No. 263 / JANUARY 1995

THE NI

NEW INTERN NA

MONTHLY UK £1.90 AUS. $4.75 AOTEAROA/NZ $4.50 CANADA/US $3.50 SA R9.50 ◆ THE PEOPLE, THE IDEAS, THE ACTION IN THE FIGHT FOR WORLD DEVELOPMENT

Unmasked

The East Asian Economic Miracle

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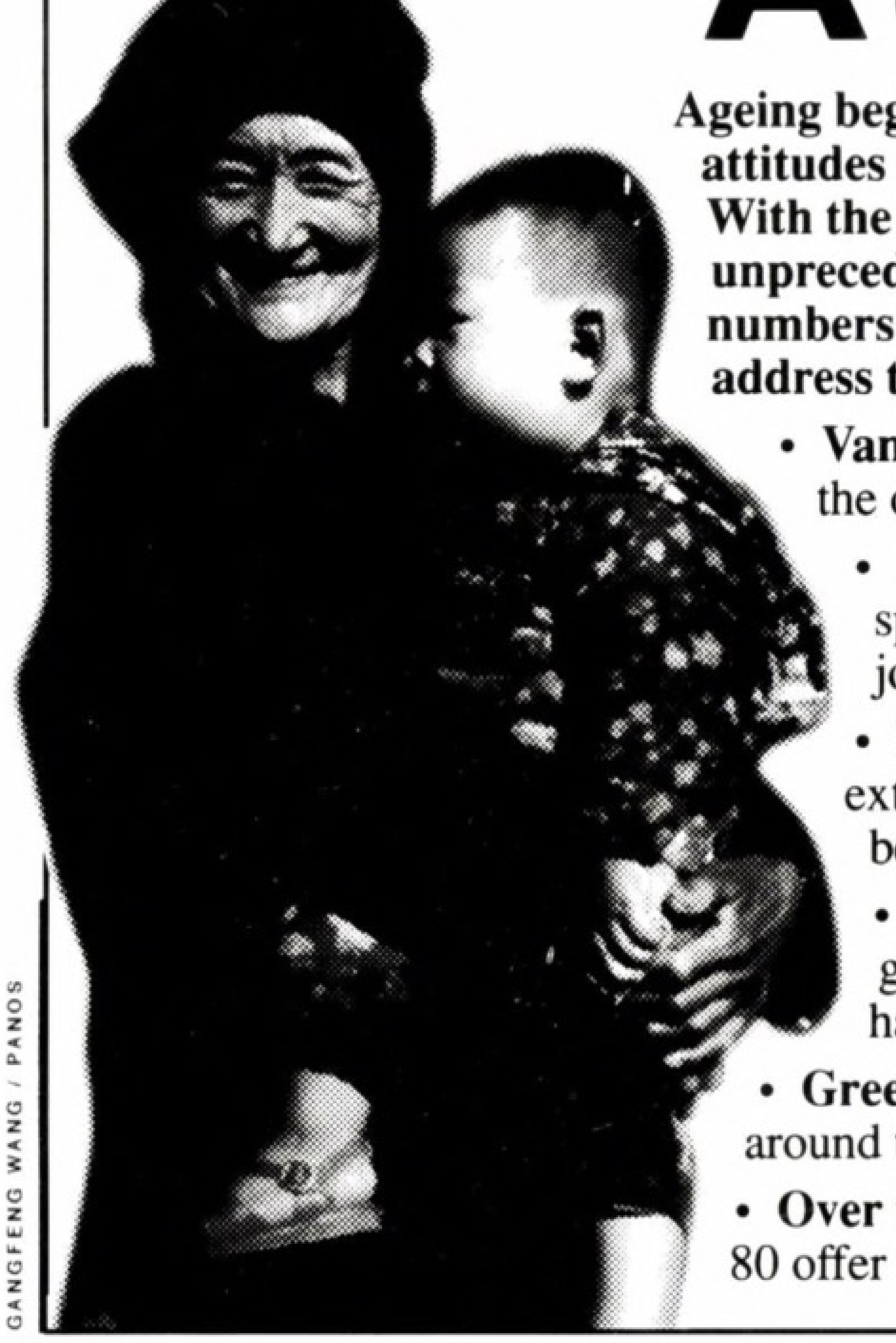
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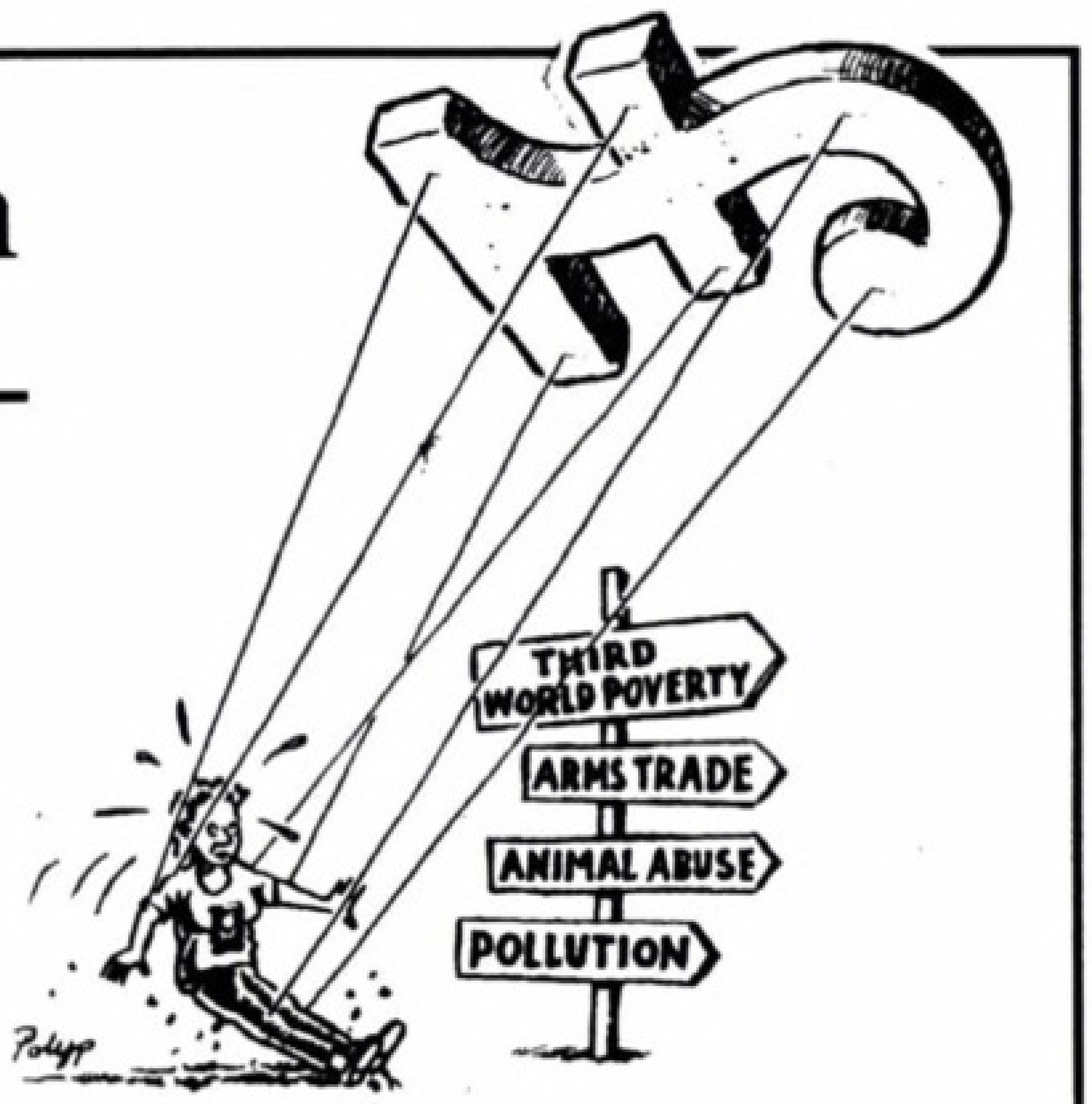

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On the move with the Earth in mind

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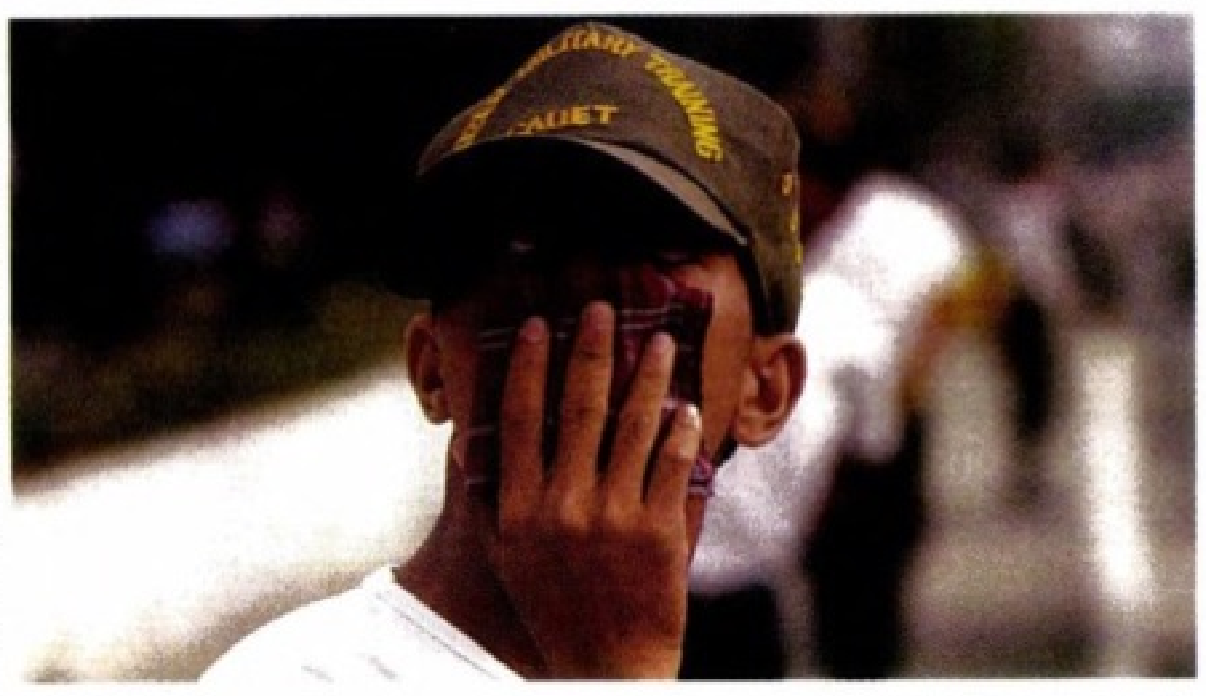

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FRONT COVER PHOTO: TRADITIONAL KOREAN DEMON MASK,
COURTESY OF **PITT RIVERS MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD**.
MAGAZINE DESIGNED BY **IAN NIXON.**

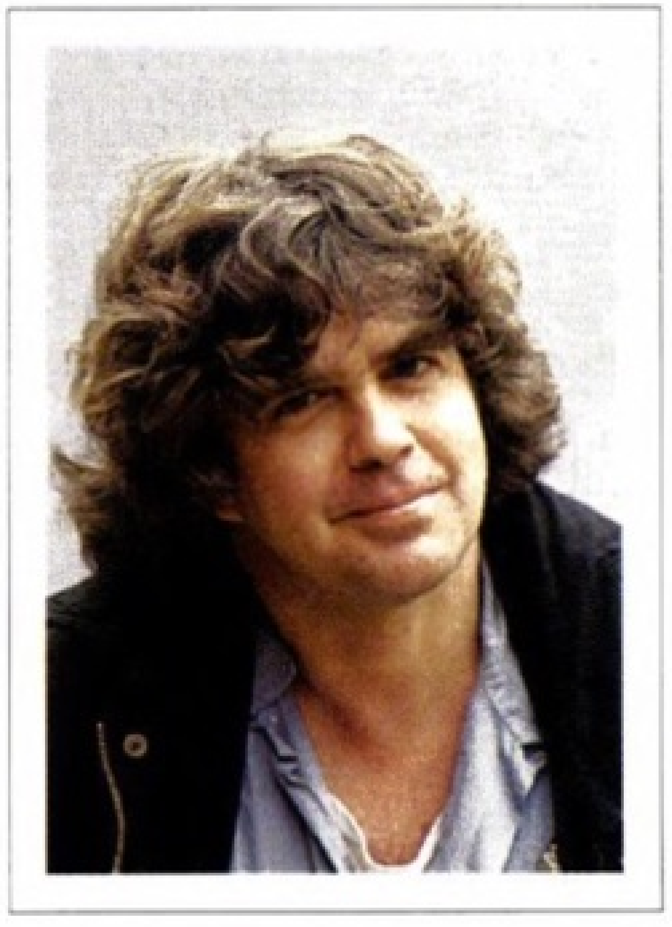
THIS MONTH'S **THEME**

The East Asian economic miracle

FROM THIS MONTH'S **EDITOR**

JOURNALISM is the great excuse of the curious. I certainly fall into this category – in fact I fear I am almost a chronic case. Journalism allows you to stick your nose into the affairs of others and ask questions about things that are really none of your business. For the most part people are receptive and trusting. I am never quite sure why.

Sometimes they feel that you can be of direct aid to whatever struggle they are engaged in – that what you write will make a difference. Mostly it doesn't, except in the most general sense. But when people tell you their stories – sometimes tragic, often funny, inevitably important – I feel a certain sense of obligation passed to me by the narrator.



So it was with this issue on the human side of the Asian economic miracle. I talked to dozens of people about their lives or issues that are very close to their hearts. I have included as much as possible of this: either as direct quotes and stories or as a sensibility that informs my sorting out of the issues in East Asia. But inevitably it feels inadequate – that I have in some way let them down. Too many stories – like those of the guest workers in Hong Kong or Korea's environmental groups – remain to be told. But there should be plenty here to provoke the chronically curious. Special thanks are due to Minji Che and Colin who helped me to see things I would not otherwise have seen.

Being in an unfamiliar place is revealing not only for the differences but for the quite startling similarities. After a few days in Seoul I was desperate for some English-language news, so I picked up a rather skimpy copy of that morning's *Korea Herald*. And there it was on page three – 'the article'. You know the type from your own country's press – we have to tighten our belts if we are going to compete, our workers have got to stop making unrealistic demands, there are other countries where people would be glad for the jobs at a fraction of the wage, government spending has to be geared to making us more competitive not wasted on 'unproductive' welfare schemes.

But wait a sec. I thought the Koreans were the people we had to worry about because they were taking *our* jobs.

Then the morning caffeine finally hit my veins, bringing with it enlightenment. It was the same article! It just circulated around the globe, from paper to paper, to be reproduced as the need arose to use the market whip on 'unrealistic' expectations. To banish our Utopian dreams. Very handy really. Brings to mind that Brecht quote: 'If this is Utopian, I would ask you to consider why this is so.'

Richard Swift

Richard Swift
*for the **New Internationalist** Co-operative*

The **New Internationalist** welcomes your letters. But please keep them short. They may be edited for purposes of space or clarity. Include a home telephone number if possible and send your letters to the nearest editorial office. The address is inside the front cover.

Dual thinking

I must take to task Vanessa Baird in her keynote article on the *Arms Trade* (**NI 261**) when she says 'the arms trade cannot be blamed for starting the conflicts in Bosnia, Angola, Sudan, Burma or Turkey'.

THE NI NEW INTERNATIONALIST
Lethal Lies
The Arms Trade

I'm afraid that anyone who is involved in the manufacture or trade of arms is responsible for all wars and conflicts throughout the globe. To think otherwise is to continue the dualistic thinking that creates all the exploitation, greed and suffering that **NI** portrays every month.

Peace starts and ends in every one of our hearts and when we realize this, we can begin to create a civilized society.

David Hughes
Merseyside, UK

The Baltic States

Your issue on *IMF/World Bank* (**NI 257**) was on target. However, there was little reportage on the new victims of the former Soviet Union. By 1992 the new republics were free from what they once considered to be their economic chains. The Bretton Woods organizations rubbed their hands. Loans and their conditions were established and deflation was promised.

Things turned out a little different. Against the established tried-and-tested and mass-marketed foreign commodities both public and private local industry are having a hard time. The IMF representative to the Baltic States, Adalbert Knobl, jumped when in July the Lithuanian Government imposed high customs duties for agricultural imports in an effort to allow domestic production to compete, at least on home ground. In September the Government announced a reduction of 10 per cent in import tariffs. Such erratic changes are due solely to IMF manipulation; they made it known that further 'aid', including an imminent $200 million loan, would only be contracted if imports were given a generous welcome.

Lithuania and its neighbours are not part of the Third World. But how long will it be before the IMF dumps them into the same 'Third World' pile?

Howard Jarvis
Lithuanian Weekly, Kent, UK

Prison writing

As expected when you published my articles in your *Endpiece* (**NI 259** and **NI 260**), I received several letters and cards thanking me for the insights into prison life. I was glad to get these responses but sad that with the exception of two letters none of the communications bore return addresses.

In fact one letter writer wrote: 'The treatment you described in prison must change. I shan't give you my address because I am scared to do so...' Alas, that attitude and theme came through loud and clear in almost every letter. It made me weep.

What a sad contradiction… the very people who sought to acknowledge my humanity with their sympathetic words of support quite literally dehumanized me in their fear of placing an address on the letter. I am afraid that much of society has a long way to go in terms of learning how to treat prisoners.

Those among you whose sympathetic words are supported with courage instead of fear. I respectfully urge and encourage you to explore and discover my humanity. I have much to share with you, not least of which is my friendship. Write.

Brandon Astor Jones,
G2-51, EF-122216, GDCC; PO Box 3877,
Jackson, Georgia 30233, US.

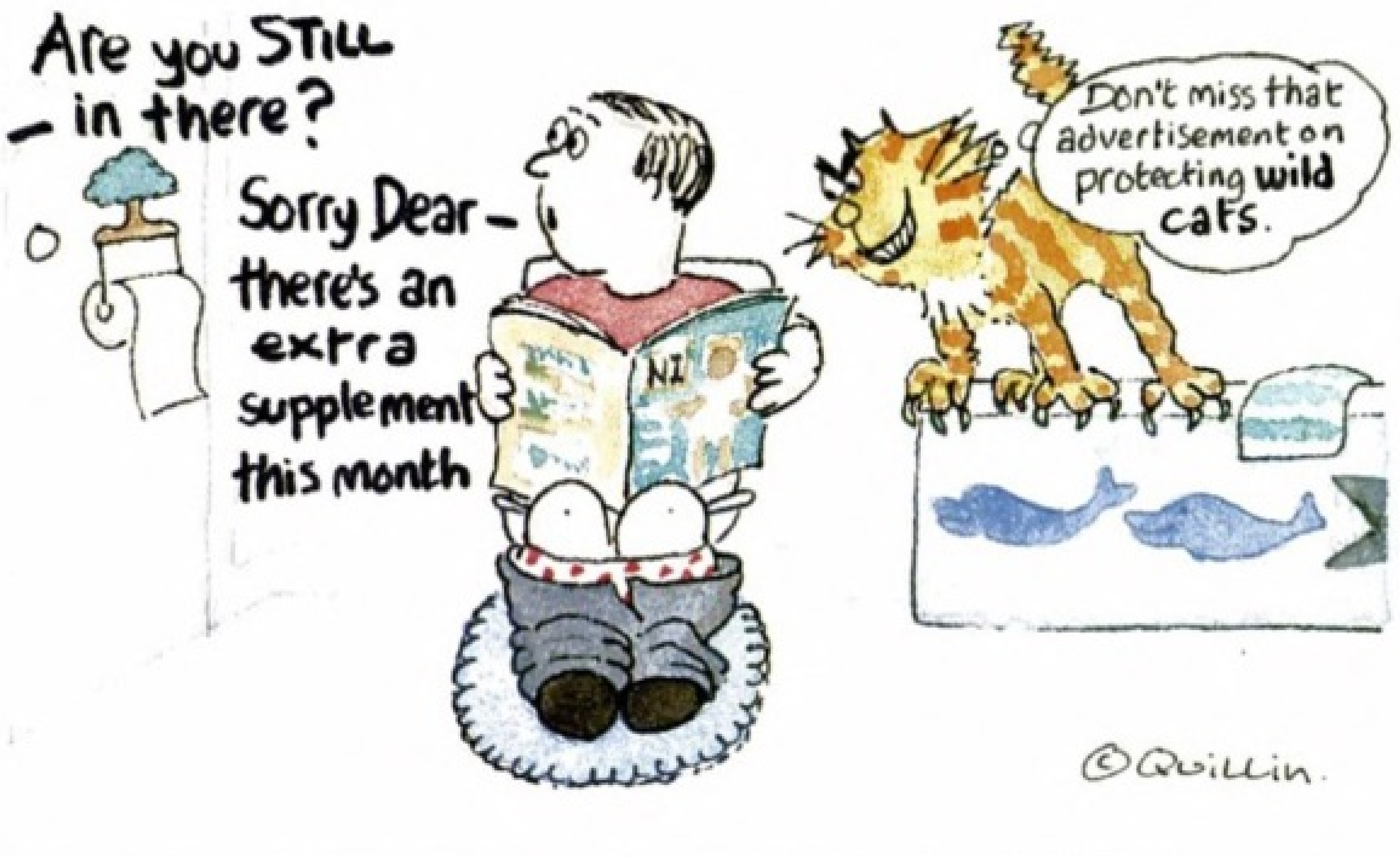
Bottoms down

In support of your wonderful magazine I suggest a new basis on which you could promote **NI**. I have been an avid reader for many years, but seem to find no time in my life to read it. So I have a special magazine rack next to the toilet. While attending to nature's call I can snatch a few moments to read. And I have discovered that it takes almost exactly a month to read **NI** by this method, leaving me ready to tackle each subsequent issue by the same plan of attack.

I don't know whether you determine the length of the **NI** on this basis, but it is certainly an asset you could capitalize on. You could appeal to the more New-Age-oriented reader with a call to 'wholeness' and 'body-mind integration'. You could point out that while their bottoms were engaged in a universal human ritual, their minds could, *at the same time*, be connecting with other cultures and peoples around the world.

For your next subscription drive, I propose that you take an organically-oriented approach. I can imagine some good jingles… and perhaps a few testimonials like mine…

Stephen Gunther
Lismore, New South Wales, Australia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Inconsistencies

Your issue on *Race* (**NI 260**) contained many inconsistencies. The 'true or false' quiz berates Hinduism for the way it treats the lower castes, but lets Islam off the hook for its mistreatment of women. You suggest that the US Government should provide housing and electricity for native Americans, while criticizing Western interference in the lifestyles of other aboriginal peoples.

The problem arises from our tendency to regard Western liberal values as universal, while at the same time desiring to safeguard other cultures which subscribe to different values. To encourage the adoption of education, Western medicine, electricity, 'comfortable' housing, let alone promote anti-racism and women's rights in non-Western society is perhaps an example of Western cultural imperialism.

The question is whether such cultural imperialism is necessarily wrong. Many societies have been eager to adopt Western culture and should surely be free to do so. However, where there is resistance, it is important to respect (if not to accept) the values of those whose attitudes are inimical to our own.

N Ansell
Cambridge, UK

Defending vaccines

I was disturbed to read a letter in **NI 260** (*Race*) from Robert Sier denouncing vaccination as a part of a public health policy. He is quite simply wrong. His view is regrettably fashionable amongst the privileged who take for granted the relative freedom we enjoy from lethal childhood diseases as a result of successful immunization.

The idea that improved living standards are solely responsible for the decline of infectious disease is possibly true in the case of BCG immunization for TB. It certainly does not apply with other illnesses – as the rise in whooping cough (and deaths) which followed public scares about the safety of the vaccine demonstrates. Whooping cough is not, incidentally, a 'curable' disease, but one which can and does kill previously healthy well-nourished infants in the industrialized world and causes lasting damage to many more.

While I would agree wholeheartedly that inequitable distribution of wealth is the most important factor affecting the health of the world's people, it is at best plain silly to disregard those technological measures which still prevent literally thousands of deaths each year – among rich and poor alike.

Dr Robert Wheatley
Stoke-on-Trent, UK

Inflated classes

The new middle classes in India have become the focus of the media and overseas business. With their inflation-proofed salaries, they zoom around in their fancy cars and ignore the suffering of the majority of their fellow citizens.

The Indian Finance Minister, Mr Manmohan Singh, is now preoccupied with the introduction of Value Added Tax. No prizes for guessing who will end up with the burden. Not the middle classes but the poor, the same people who are hit very hard by inflation because they are on fixed incomes (or no income at all). But the Finance Minister does not seem to have heard of inflation.

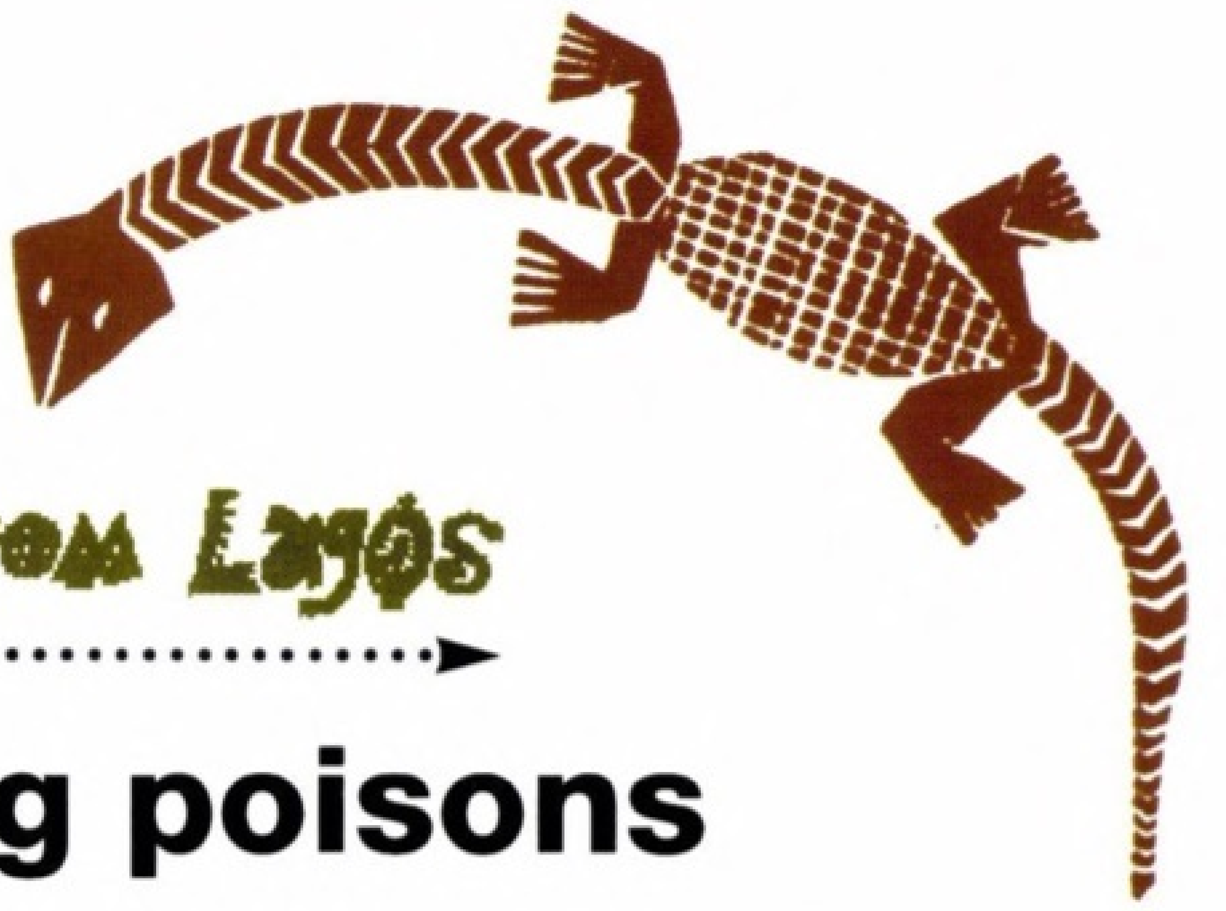
Anand Apte
Bombay, India

Thanks for Timor

This is a late thanks for your issue on *East Timor* (**NI 253**). It continues to be a great resource for us, and a reference point for new members looking for background on East Timor – an issue marginalized here by the mainstream press.

Stephen Langford
Australia-East Timor Association
Paddington, New South Wales, Australia

The views expressed on the letters page are not necessarily those of the NI.



Letter from Lagos

Consuming poisons

Elizabeth Obadina tells a cautionary tale of fakes and fraudsters.

WE were celebrating the return from America of some very old friends. It was the third bottle of wine that caused someone to comment: 'Maybe I've had too much to drink or perhaps it is just my eyesight but this Liebfraumilch looks decidedly green.'

'No. It's just the reflection of Ade's green shirt through the glass,' someone else said hopefully.

By now everyone was concentrating myopically on their glasses. The bottle was taken to the daylight and under the familiar but rather badly-printed picture of a madonna-type person was the small print: 'Bottled for the Nigerian market by…' Certainly this was a vintage of the German wine it would be almost impossible to find in Germany. Probably the only German thing about it was its copied trademark, 'Liebfraumilch'. We looked again. The label didn't actually say 'Liebfraumilch', it said 'Liebfrauschatz'. It was an entirely different wine. Genuine Liebfraumilch is clear. 'Liebfrauschatz' seemed to have particles of a German snowstorm floating up and down in it.

LIEB
FRAU
SCHATZ

ILLUSTRATION: ALISON MORTON

Later that night volcanic activity in my stomach sent me leaping from my bed in some considerable pain and heading for the bathroom where I scorched my throat returning my supper to the outside world. I blamed the green wine for I was not alone in my agony. The other green-wine drinkers also suffered.

I suppose we were luckier than the man who went home to the village for Christmas bearing a bottle of 'imported' gin for his father which sent the old man to an early grave.

Some six years ago I wrote an article on fake products for a consumer magazine. Little has changed since then except that the Nigerian standards organization (NSO) has changed its name to the Standards Organization of Nigeria (SON) to avoid confusion with another NSO, the Nigerian Security Organization. Presumably the latter also disliked being mistaken for the toothless consumer body, for they beefed up their acronym to become the State Security Services (SSS), the scourge of all opposition to Nigeria's military rulers.

Over the past six years the consumers' situation in Nigeria has worsened. The price of all imported products and reputable locally-manufactured goods has escalated way beyond the means of most people. But like consumers the world over, customers retain brand loyalty. It's the traders' rule to give the consumer what they want. Or at least what they think they want. What they often get is decidedly not what they really want.

My last purchase of Colgate toothpaste brought forth howls of foaming protest from my children. 'Ah Mum, this is fake. Full of grit,' spluttered my daughter. '419! 419! 419!' chanted my sons. Nowadays every kid's vocabulary includes '419' meaning dubious, criminal or fake. It refers to the Nigerian penal code which deals with fraud.

Actually the Colgate probably wasn't 'fake'. It was simply a product of 'Sunshine Cosmetics Ltd', Hyderabad, India. Certainly not the product we were used to buying. Has Colgate become yet another of the multinational brand names to have disinvested from Nigeria? I couldn't find out in time for this letter. But it would hardly be news if it had.

The list of household products closing down in Nigeria is very long but consumers still want to buy the products so they are either faked or imported. Local ex-franchise holders also continue to produce familiar products, without the quality control imposed by the parent multinational company. This runs the risk of a copyright or patent prosecution from the brand name's owner but in Nigeria no-one making money worries much about being taken to court.

Nowadays the smart trader interested in making 'real money' takes a round trip to Hong Kong where he or she buys up a container-load or two of 'fairly used' electronic, electrical and mechanical brand-name items which are shipped back to Nigeria, smartened up and sold 'as new' to unsuspecting consumers.

I could laugh about the 'genuine' American sheets that turned out to be all the cloth droppings from the machine-room floor painstakingly sewn together. Only my pocket was hurt. Sadly for those who don't return home with the genuine article the consequences can be more tragic. Pity the many parents a couple of years ago who bought their sick children fake paracetamol syrup which killed.

There must be better ways for Nigerians to expend energy than constantly going into battle against fakes and duplicity. ■

Elizabeth Obadina is a freelance writer and journalist living in Lagos.

KEYNOTE

Unmasking the miracle

PHILIP JONES GRIFFITHS / MAGNUM

The noise of money talking tries to drown out the voice of opposition in the 'export-led' economies of East Asia. But the murmur of discontent over who bears the costs of growth is getting ever louder. ***Richard Swift*** *lends an ear.*

THE business executive was warming to his subject – the wonders of commerce in Hong Kong. There is a 'buzz' to the markets here that you just don't feel anywhere else. Even Tokyo is stolid by comparison. He'd seen multi-million dollar deals clinched over a beer, like the Corona we were downing for eight dollars a pop in the hotel lounge. He certainly wasn't planning to leave in 1997 when the Chinese Government takes over the shop. He didn't believe communism really exists any more anyway. Don't Deng and Li, the Chinese leaders, always fly first class? Why would they kill the goose that lays the golden egg? Already they own much of Hong Kong real estate through their local holding company.

His eyes grew bright and his hands moved with great animation. His enthusiasm was infectious. Entrepreneurial folk-tales of fortunes made, lost and then remade poured forth. It wasn't just about the 'bottom line' either. There were visionaries here. Men like Gordon Wu, who has already started the first links in a new Asian superhighway that will run from Hong Kong through the Shenzhen Special Export Zone across the border, down through south China, into Vietnam and on to Bangkok. It will be the new Silk Highway. There's a sign you see on bus shelters all over Hong Kong: 'We Make Success Here' it boasts.

The boom and bustle of success is evident throughout East Asia. It's the same in Seoul or Taipei. Business is booming. Those who thought the 'Four Tigers' (Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore in South-East Asia) were a flash-in-the-pan have had to go back to their calculators. The tigers are now well into their third decade of solid economic performance. Some of the companies spawned by this boom, particularly the large Korean *chaebol* firms like Samsung and Hyundai, are on their way to becoming major corporate players worldwide – investing everywhere, from China to Brazil. In the industrial North they prefer depressed, job-hungry regions with weak trade unions – like Samsung's new electronics plant in Newcastle, Britain or Hyundai's car-production facility in the eastern townships of Quebec.

Success is now spreading to a second tier of Asian countries. Malaysia and Thailand have both entered the manufacturing exporters' sweepstakes, with south China and Indonesia not far behind. Peasant societies that produced rice and vegetables just a few short years ago are now churning out digital computers, cameras, even cars.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund – desperate for some vindication of their market-driven, free-trade doctrine – have been pushing this 'NIC (Newly Industrializing Countries) model' as the answer to all Third World poverty. But NIC success has often been achieved by ignoring rather than embracing Bank

JAMES NACHTWEY / MAGNUM

In your face! Autocratic rule in South Korea meets with a fiery response from the democratic movement (above).
We shall not be moved – the tenants in Pynchong-dong take a stand (below).

and Fund advice. At least in South Korea and Taiwan the heavy hand of government (the thing the Bank and the Fund deplore most) has been very active: protecting domestic markets, subsidizing exports, controlling credit, running nationalized industries and regulating labour relations.

One could be excused for thinking that the recent story of Asia belongs primarily on the business pages. But there are other voices aside from those of company directors and financial pundits. They are not so easy to hear – it is hard to speak louder than money. But they are there nonetheless.

RICHARD SWIFT

Other voices: the social movements

'We have no place to go from here.' These words are spoken by Nam Sang-wa, deputy-chairperson of a tenant's committee in Pynchong-dong, part of the bigger Bongchun-dong area of south-east Seoul.

A dozen or so tenants are gathered in the living room in one of the houses that has so far escaped the wrecker's hammer. Kids run in and out of the room, sitting on their parents' laps until they get restless from too much grown-up talk. And talk there is aplenty. It swirls around the room as they pass the verbal baton from one to the other, trying to explain to me, this odd outsider the evening has thrown up, just how the mechanics of property speculation affect poor people.

Everyone is well dressed in neatly pressed, colourful clothes – putting me to shame. Koreans pay great attention to personal appearance, even though these people make very small incomes as day labourers, street vendors or doing the housework of the upper-middle class.

They are country people who have moved to Seoul in the last few years. On the hillside areas of greater Bongchun-dong poor people are making their last stand in a city rapidly being gobbled up by expensive highrises. Too many people are chasing too little housing on increasingly expensive land – a side-effect of miracle economics ignored on the business pages. Absentee house-owners in Pynchong-dong sold out to a development company that, with Government approval, has hired a demolition firm to destroy their community. Already 75 per cent of the people have been forced out.

But some 134 households are determined to stay. They hold rallies – and drum festivals, like the one that happened the previous weekend. The demolition company, for its part, turns out the street lights and sets small fires. One of the tenants points to a house 100 metres down the road where some heavy-looking, tattooed guys are hanging out. He says they are members of street gangs the company has moved in to harass people as they move up and down the hill. So far it's only been insults and threats and scaring the kids. But in the future, who knows? They fear the worst.

The talk goes on well into the evening. Theirs is no isolated struggle. The tenants estimate that there are five major redevelopment zones in greater Seoul and some 500 different struggles to resist forced removal. As we wind our way through the narrow alleys down to the main street a loudspeaker blares out over the hillside.

The tenants are rallying their forces for the next meeting.

Such 'quiet heroisms' have seen the democratic movement in South Korea through some pretty rough times. Social movements here are highly organized affairs. They have local chapters and national offices, alliances and coalitions, executives and minutes. Files are neatly stacked, membership payments charted on walls. The residents of Pynchong-dong are connected to the Roomers Association that is part of the Association of Urban Poor. This has some 80,000 members and is fighting for the rights of tenants, for decent daycare, and for the street vendors who strive to create a life in the cracks of the Korean economy.

These vendors add a dynamism to Seoul's streets – whether they're selling huge, juicy pears or setting up portable bars where one can sit and wash down a variety of seafood snacks. But they have become the latest target of the state's obsession with control from above. Restrictive zoning laws are being used to sweep them away, these last vestiges of Third World city life.

In all the NICs except Hong Kong social movements come face to face with an authoritarian state constantly trying to narrow the political space for popular resistance. Most of the people I met in Korea had served time in prison – not months but years. Even those who managed to avoid the attentions of the police have paid a price. The work of Kim Sung-Kyu in the poor people's movement over the past 10 years has left him screened out of regular employment by vigilant managers. It is very difficult for 'agitators' to remain anonymous.

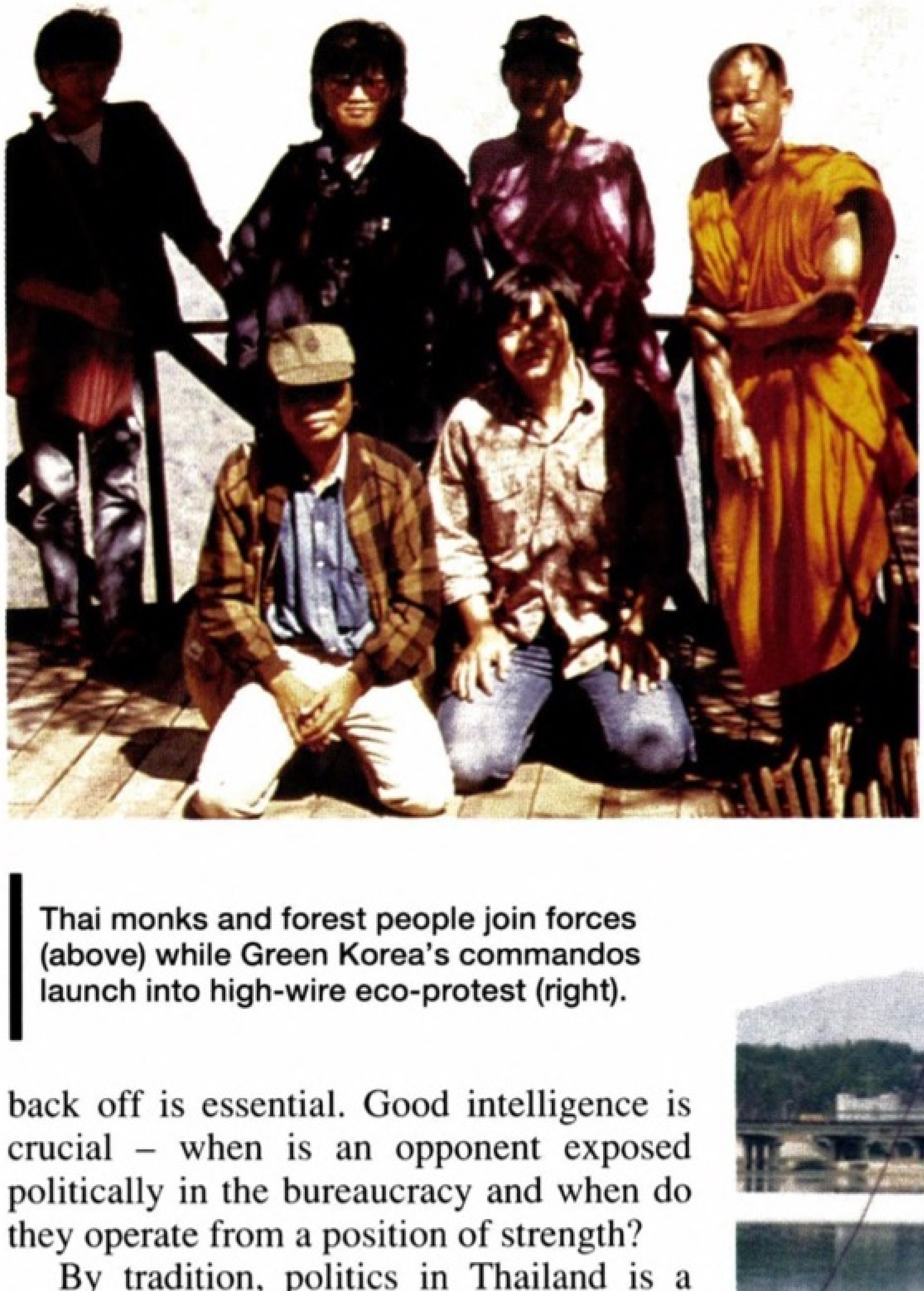
Timid democratic reforms

In South Korea and Taiwan there have been timid moves towards civilian and democratic government but the apparatus of repression is still firmly in place. As you ride Seoul's bright new subway the same voice that announces the stations also warns you to keep an eye out for troublemakers who may be North Korean spies. Posters from the Korean Central Intelligence Agency carry the same message.

In Malaysia things are becoming more, not less repressive. Under Prime Minister Dr Mahathir the Internal Security Act has been amended 18 times – each time to give it more bite. Even in a culture of tolerance like Thailand's the state can get very heavy, very fast. Thai writer Sanitsuda Ekachai, whose poignant reportage in *Behind the Smile* evokes the pain of a rural Thailand plundered for the world market, has seen it more than once. It seems ironic – sitting as we are in the ultra-modern office of the *Bangkok Post* – for her to blame the feudal roots of classical Thai paternalism. 'It's paternal indulgence,' she says. 'You are my children, you are tolerated to a certain extent, but I can spank you if I feel that you have gone too far, then after that I can be nice, calm and indulgent again.' Such 'spankings' can take the form of extra-judicial killings and disappearances or even of the Tiananmen-style slaughter of pro-democracy students that occurred in the centre of Bangkok in 1992.

The social movements of South Korea confront the hooded, Darth Vader-like police and their massive metal shields with a forthright militancy that is best admired from afar. Fire-bombs and metal poles are the tools of this risky trade – although very few are ever killed or even seriously injured. It is a kind of ritual in which the state must be made to bear some cost for their high-handed treatment of the citizenry. The Green Warriors (all beefy former paratroopers) of the eco-activist group Green Korea dangle on ropes from dams and bridges to expose the latest ecological folly.

In Thailand and Malaysia such tactics are inconceivable. Guile is the best asset of social protest here. Demonstrations appear out of nowhere and disappear just as quickly. Knowing when to push and when to back off is essential. Good intelligence is crucial – when is an opponent exposed politically in the bureaucracy and when do they operate from a position of strength?



Thai monks and forest people join forces (above) while Green Korea's commandos launch into high-wire eco-protest (right).

PROJECT OF ECOLOGICAL RENEWAL

By tradition, politics in Thailand is a game played over the heads of the populace. Witoon, director of the Project for Ecological Recovery (PER) in Bangkok, has a good fix on this 'clientist' political culture. 'It runs not by principles but by emotions,' he says. 'Pendulums swing back and forth and you must always know where the line is. The bureaucracy is very strong and if you challenge them outright they will come down very hard. But if you can show them benefits and appeal to their interests...'

Sucking the countryside dry

'I think the most productive thing that one can do in life is to build a house or to farm,' says Cho Soung-Woo, whose usually cheerful expression passes to one of sad contemplation. His thoughts drift back to his home village and the deserted houses. 'There are more of them every year – it is becoming a village of old people.'

Cheap food imports from the US have flooded South Korea, destroying a once-prosperous farming sector and driving 500,000 people off the land every year. Cho is president of the Korean Farmers Alliance. Despite his masters degree in Christian theology he takes pride in the street-fighting prowess of his members when they demonstrate against cheap food imports. Low food prices in south Korea and Taiwan mean lower wages in the manufactured-export sector.

But it is in places like Malaysia and Thailand, with majority rural populations, where the high-handed urban bias of miracle economics has been most damaging. Low prices have combined here with destructive mega-projects into a powerful 'push-factor', driving people into the factories of the export economy. Thailand has been a playground for the dam-builders – heavily bankrolled by the World Bank – and logging companies who have together laid waste to vast tracts of land and displaced thousands of farming families.

살아야 우리산다
한국부인회
대전지부

GREEN KOREA

RICHARD SWIFT

RICHARD SWIFT

Poisoned! Wonjin Rayon workers return with gas masks and protest vests to their deserted factory (above), where Park Song Soon contracted a crippling disease (right).

Witoon at the Project for Ecological Recovery sees the pattern behind the plunder: 'Over half the electricity produced by the hydro boom is soaked up by Bangkok with its massive luxury hotels and burgeoning industrial base.' PER is part of a wave of hundreds of non-governmental organizations which act as animators of citizens' action to stop the ruin of rural Thailand. There have been some notable victories – the seven-year-long campaign that stopped the Kanchanaburi Dam on the river Kwai, or the ban on commercial logging in national forests and wildlife sanctuaries.

There has been less success with stopping a dam on the Moon river. Village protests, particularly in the impoverished north-east, are easily isolated without external allies. Witoon sees the role of a group like PER as turning local protest into national issues. Tactics must be carefully crafted lest groups be manipulated by local politicians or some faction of Thailand's formidable military. The thin lines of villagers and 'forest guardians' blocking logging roads or resisting the siting of eucalyptus plantations in their forest homes are running real risks. Someone told me: 'It costs only $200 to have a Thai killed, twice that for a *farang*e (foreigner).'

With forest cover dropping from 50 to 20 per cent in just 30 years it is now quite clear that rural Thailand faces a serious shortfall in exploitable resources. The Government is responding by trying to reduce rice farming – so that more scarce water is freed up for the export factories of Bangkok, and more rural people are driven into its slums.

Crusty Father Joe Maier has worked in those slums for 17 years. He feels the loss of something distinctive in Thai life. 'There used to be a kind of *Sabeeh! Sabeeh!* ('Let life come as it will') but now folks must have three or four sources of income just to keep up,' he says. With the glorification of the entrepreneur-as-hero it is easy to forget just who put in the long and arduous hours to build these miracle economies.

Runaway miracle

Workers are, however, finally beginning to reap some of the benefits. Thanks to hard-fought union-organizing drives wages have shot up – to the point that in Hong Kong and Korea they are 10 times those paid in Indonesia or in the export-processing zones of mainland China. This has provoked Taiwanese and Korean companies to shift investments to lower-wage locales – and, sometimes, low-wage migrants to their factories at home. The Asian miracle is on the move, with mobile capital and runaway investment in a restless search for ever-cheaper labour and newer markets.

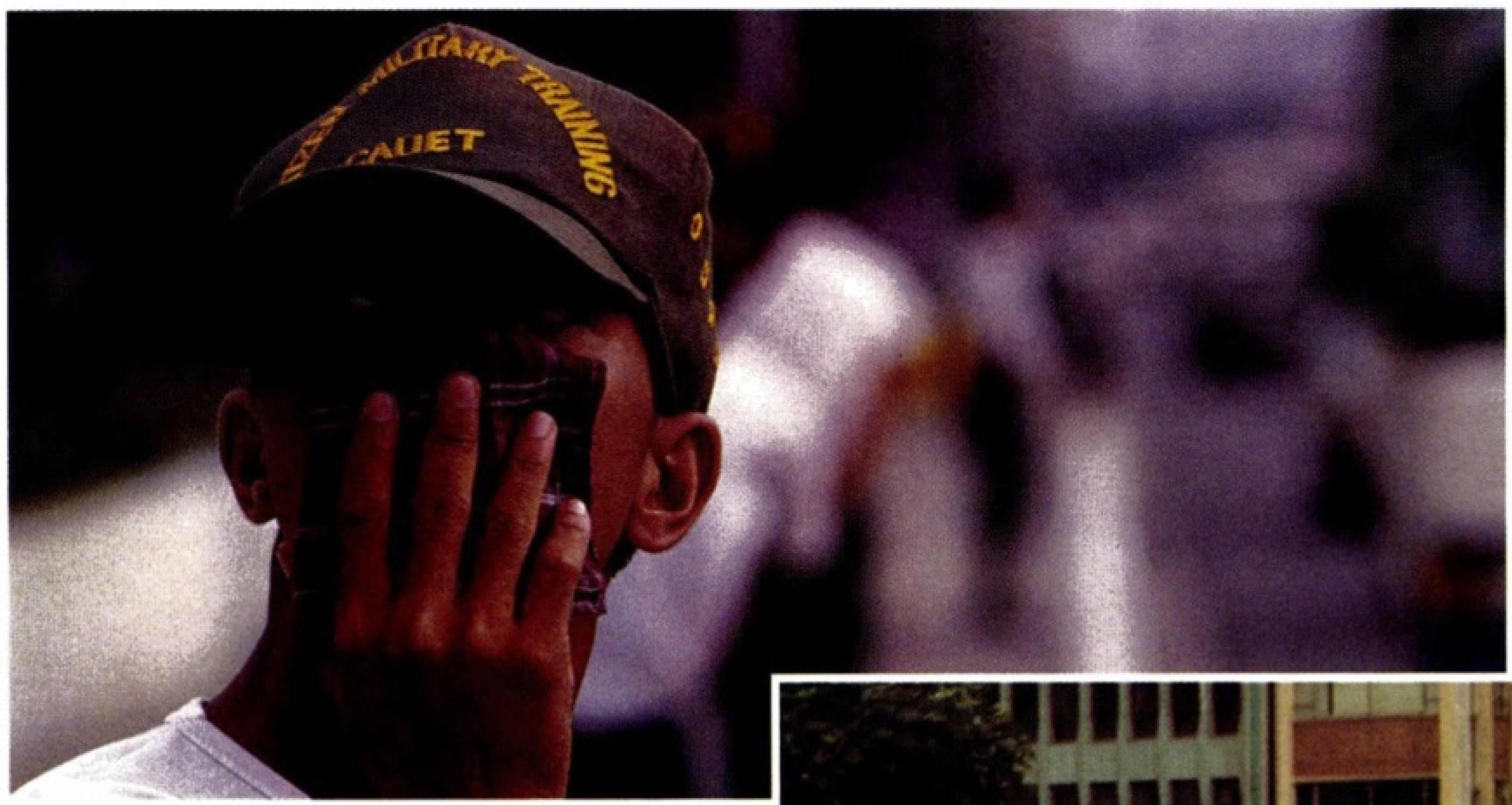
Wonjin Rayon occupies a vast site several blocks long in Mikum City outside Seoul. These days its mighty stacks no longer belch forth smoke. In its ghostlike silence it appears like a new Roman ruin of our industrial age – a relic of what economists glibly term 'sunset' industry.

But one can glimpse a stirring of activity behind the distant security fence – Chinese workers packing up the old machinery for the trip back to Dantong City in north China. Why Chinese workers? 'No Korean worker would agree to touch this killer technology,' says Lee Hong Jo of the Wonjin Emergency Counter Measures Committee.

I meet Lee and a group of other former Wonjin workers in their cramped office a short bus ride from the factory. They have lots of time on their hands and the office has become a place to meet their friends and to pursue the serious business of protest – with an impressive lightness of heart. Lee explains that the textile factory was already 20 years old when it was imported from Japan in the late 1950s. Since that time, the workers say, it has killed 16 of them and left 30 more 'like vegetables' – the result of exposure to carbon bisulphate leaking from the ancient machines. The lung poisoning is a degenerative disease. They introduce me

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH TIGERS

- The Asia Monitor Resource Centre in Hong Kong publishes the quarterly ***Asia Labour Update*** with excellent material on the struggle for labour rights in East Asia – $12.00 (US) a year. Their address is 444 Nathan Road, 8-B Kowloon, Hong Kong.
- On the situation of workers in mainland China take a look at the occasional ***China Labour Bulletin***, PO Box 72465, Central Post Office, Kowloon, Hong Kong.
- For a wide-ranging sweep of the crucial development issues facing East Asia and the state of popular resistance some excellent documentation (including their regular newsletter ***Communique***) comes from Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives (ARENA). A sub to ***Communique*** ($20) and full publications list can be obtained from Arena Press, GAV. PO Box 86205, Hong Kong.
- ***Baedal Update*** published in English by the environmental group Green Korea is a good source of material on the ecological crisis on the Korean peninsula. Their contact address is Nam, Sangmin, Baedal Update, Green Korea, Jung-ku, Jungchon-dong 102-2, Taejon, Korea.
- ***Civil Society*** published bi-monthly by the Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice in Seoul gives a good overview of political and social issues facing Korean society. Subs are $25 to CCEJ, 25-1 Chongro-5 Ga, Chongro-Gu, Seoul, Korea 110-125.



CARLOS GUARITA / REPORTAGE

CHICAGO BULLS

RICHARD SWIFT

Yuk! The fallout from Asia's miracle economics – a cost not figured into the price of progress (above). Hong Kong's bull market – but for how long (right)?

to Park Sang Soon, a serene 53-year-old woman, who is in the first stages of the disease – headaches, speech problems, hair loss.

After an extensive campaign the workers finally got the authorities to shut the plant down. An official investigation held that it should stay that way and the ageing technology should be scrapped. Workers were guaranteed new jobs. The result: still no jobs and the killer machines have been sold to China. Now every week the workers travel the hour-and-a-half to downtown Seoul to demonstrate – not only for the promised compensation but to prevent the future deaths of Chinese textile workers too.

The story of Wonjin Rayon traces a micro-geography of the shifting 'miracle' economics – from Japan to Korea to China. As low-wage and polluting employment packs up shop it is replaced by high-tech (Taiwan and Singapore), heavy industry (Korea) or service jobs (Hong Kong). NIC prosperity is based on the ability to export. As wages improve they become less competitive and a shift must be made to exporting goods with higher 'value added'. The problem is that someone else – often with a better reputation for quality, like the Japanese or the Europeans – already has these markets sown up. In addition, Japanese transnationals control – and lease out on increasingly disadvantageous terms – the technology necessary for much of this kind of production.

The Asian values offensive

A slow-down in growth has now begun in the mature miracle economies. This may be just the opportunity social movements need to provoke a public rethink about the balance between economic growth and sane, safe, social development. But they require democratic space in which to accomplish this. This is proving hard to come by. The Cold War lingers on in east Asia. Cold War ideology has cemented the control of generals and technocrats on both sides of the bamboo curtain. Repressive anti-communism has been a mainstay of the political diet from Taipei to Jakarta.

But Cold War bogies aren't scaring the crowds the way they used to. So a new discourse for 'top-down' control has to be found. The leading candidate is 'Asian values'. A major offensive is under way, accompanied by much nationalistic speechifying, conferences on 'Rethinking Human Rights' and PR stunts like the public head-shaving of rock stars on TV. But what does it mean? A Buddhist scepticism about consumer materialism? A more balanced approach to life that values nature as well as industry?

Far from it. 'Asian values', as propagated by right-wing Japanese think-tanks and echoed by people like Lee Kwan Yew in Singapore and Mahathier in Malaysia, boil down to a sterile cultural conformism and absolute obedience. 'Commitment to the national community' is ensured through draconian legal sanctions, the widespread use of capital and corporal punishment. The rights of those who disagree or are just different must be subsumed into the 'greater good'. East Asian social activists are unlikely to be fooled by bellicose 'anti-imperialism' – they know full well that they will be among the first targeted as violators.

It is in the crowded streets of Hong Kong island and Kowloon that you find the offices of regional human-rights and development organizations who take an overview of what is happening to East Asia as a whole. Here the Asian Monitor Resource Centre works with unions across the region on workers' rights. The All-Asian Students Association helps to stimulate student activism.

John Sayer is director of the Hong Kong branch of Oxfam and an ardent critic of what he sees as a simple-minded analysis of the NIC phenomenon. He emphasizes the sweeping changes the region has undergone and stresses the benefits to ordinary people of being able to offer their children healthier lives and better opportunities. He is unimpressed with what he feels is the anti-development bias of many Third World support groups. 'You have to replace bad development with good development – you can't use acupuncture to decommission a nuclear-power station,' he says.

Sayer is optimistic about east Asians embracing 'post-wealth' considerations like democracy and the limits to growth. He is surely right that there is no going back to pre-industrial Asia – even those on the bottom rung of the NIC ladder will tell you that. But optimism about a democratic and sustainable future is easier to believe in liberal Hong Kong – at least for the moment – than almost anywhere else. Singapore and Indonesia have had fast-track growth policies and markets open to the world for decades, but remain ruthless dictatorships. If ecological sanity is coming to Taiwan and Thailand it is arriving very late in the day indeed. Ironically, without the political space for social movements to organize and counter the unequal spread of benefits and the destruction of nature, Asian economic success will remain a house built on shifting sand. ■

武功雙帝
次庚子）孟春穀旦

The wrench of the new

In Hong Kong they are producing a play called *The Big Wind*. It is produced by the Asian People's Theatre Festival and portrays the wrenching changes East Asia is undergoing. Such changes go far beyond facts and figures, 'GNP' and retail sales. In three or four decades much of the region has undergone a profound transformation that took centuries to accomplish in Europe and North America. Whole ways of life and the old certainties that accompanied them have been ripped up. Entirely different rhythms and ideas about what matters have burst forth in their place. Basic meanings of family, work and what is possible have been shaken to the core. For better or worse – it takes some getting used to.

IAN BERRY / MAGNUM

Happy-face fascism

*It's not Big Brother but the Parent State that presides over official family values in Singapore, the technocrat's Utopia. **Sue Ann Tellman** reports on a place where no-one is supposed to grow up.*

The caning for vandalism last year of the American teenager, Michael Fay, by the Singapore Government brought strong protests from the West. The punishment may have been cruel and inappropriate but the protests reeked of hypocrisy – a high-profile diplomatic and media defence of one American teenager accompanied by the usual silence on the numerous world situations where every day millions face death, torture, hunger and forced migration.

The Singapore Government made much of this hypocrisy, helped by individual law-and-order Americans who praised Singapore for its harsh response to teenage vandalism. But the Fay caning represents just one element of a good metaphor for Singapore as a whole: parental authority institutionalized in a nation-state.

The rules sound familiar from childhood and adolescence: flush the toilet (public toilets are monitored and non-flushers fined); no gum allowed (it clogs the subway doors); cross at the stoplight (jaywalkers are resolutely fined); cut your hair (backpackers stay away); no sex (eroticism not encouraged unless it produces marriages between university graduates who will improve the stock); no drugs (mandatory death penalty, non-negotiable); above all, don't disagree with your parent (a one-party state, a controlled press, import of foreign publications restricted).

The punishments are typical of a dysfunctional family: beatings (the bamboo cane); large fines (for infractions of small rules); isolation (imprisonment of political dissidents); expulsion (for those who won't live by the rules); and, in extreme situations, death.

However, this is also a very rich parent, one of the richest in Asia. It is a parent whose primary purpose seems to be to make money, the more the better. BMWs and Mercedes Benzes abound. Anything shabby has been torn down and replaced so far upscale that only the wealthy can enter. Economic growth is a matter of national security. In 1993 three economists were put on trial under Singapore's Official Secrets Act for revealing the country's economic growth rate in advance of the Government's official announcement.

Rich families are often not happy families and Singapore is no exception. All the control makes for boredom, cultural sterility and a certain infantilism. Want to see good theatre or go to an exciting rock concert? Want to read incisive political satire or even a good Singapore novel? Want to have a stimulating discussion on culture, politics, economics, psychology or sociology? Forget it – not in Singapore. Quite seriously, conversations are more open and stimulating in Rangoon or Pyongyang – the capitals of notorious dictatorships. In Singapore idle chat could lead towards either of the Government's two big enemies – 'communist conspiracy' or 'Western liberalism'.

Instead, the Government promotes 'family values' to provide the social stability needed for continued economic growth. In the Singaporean context this means complete subservience to the state and its social dictates. And despite all the Government's preaching of 'family values' social alienation and boredom increase with rising rates of divorce, teenage crime, single-parent families and drug abuse. One crucial element in addressing these developments – a recognition of responsible human freedom – is missing, identified as it is with 'Western liberalism'. Instead, the Government keeps lecturing away on family values while increasing the social control, denying unmarried mothers access to government housing as this would confer 'respectability' on them. And, of course, more canings and more executions.

One way the Singapore Government has tried to address its people's unhappiness has been, in the best fascist tradition, to impose happiness on them. A shiny Disneyland atmosphere abounds – spotless

fast-food and entertainment franchises (McDonalds, KFC, Hard Rock Café); theme parks (one of which is in a building that until recently housed a political prisoner for 26 years – surely one of the most creative 'cruel and unusual punishments' ever devised); mini-rainforest eco-parks (next to weapons-testing ranges); controlled areas for stalls of traditional Chinese, Malay and Indian food; and shops, boutiques and shopping malls galore. Happiness is making money, spending it and helping Singapore flourish.

But the Disneyland atmosphere with its money and its happiness-message does not seem to produce very happy people. While family life continues to flourish among the poorer, less-educated minorities (the Indians and Malays who are not really a part of 'the official family'), the next generation of leaders – the money-making young Chinese professionals – show remarkably little interest in sex, marriage and family life. With the best parental concern the Government has developed its own dating service for unmarried university graduates, the Social Development Unit, housed in the Ministry of Finance. State television has gone on a family-life-is-fun campaign with commercials showing a happy family playing together and singing 'Fun, fun, fun, fun... Families are fun, fun, fun, fun.'

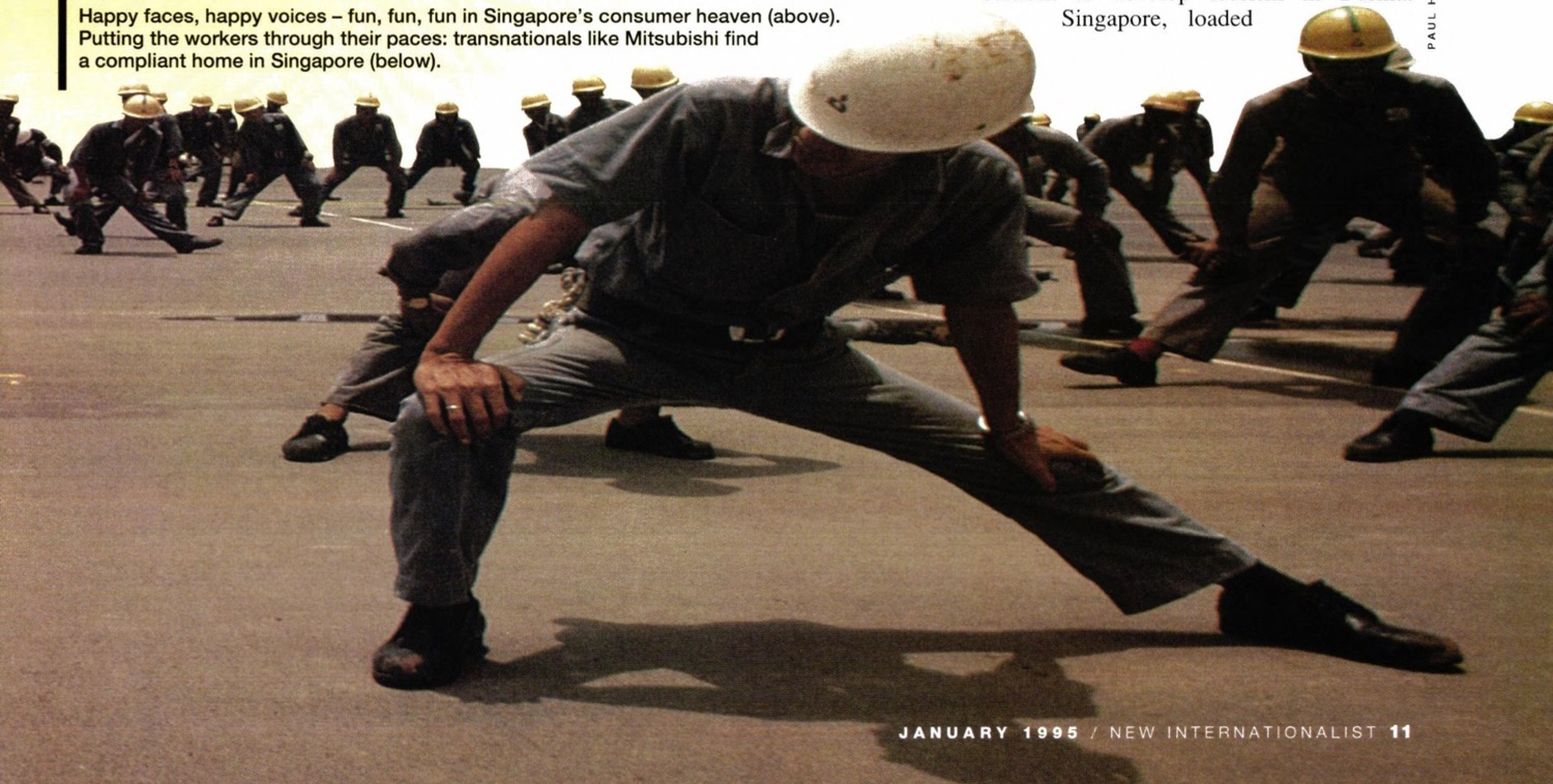
Part of the problem is that with all this attention to money, many people do not know much about sex. Any public expression of it is commonly connected with demonic 'Western liberalism'. Singapore gynaecologists routinely report women coming to them complaining of barrenness only to be told they are virgins. Reports one doctor: 'So many just don't know where to put what.' For many men masturbation by a masseuse at the health centre in the shopping mall or a visit to the sex clubs of Bangkok is enough to keep the money-making juices flowing.

CHRIS STOWERS / PANOS PICTURES

The growth of Christianity in Singapore, especially among Chinese professionals, can be seen as another sign of people's unhappiness. Unhappy with simply making money, many Singaporeans seek transcendent meaning. The Christianity that develops is evangelical, charismatic or fundamentalist, providing ecstatic experience but also sanctifying the making of money. The names of a few of the churches give a sense of the otherworldly spirituality of Christianity in Singapore: Glory Joy Christian Church, Pearly Gates Christian Fellowship, Singapore Charismatic Church, World Revival Prayer Fellowship, Harvester Baptist Church, Praise Evangelical Church – the list goes on and on. The gospel of prosperity is common – if you are a faithful Christian, God will reward you with prosperity. The Government is uncomfortable with the notion that there may be a higher power than itself and has instituted a Religious Harmony Act which prohibits any preaching on social or political issues.

The patriarch of this large dysfunctional family, where free and autonomous adulthood is so elusive, is Lee Kuan Yew, leader of the People's Action Party. Lee was Prime Minister from 1959 to 1990 and is now Senior Minister advising Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong. Interviews with Lee portray an authoritarian, eccentric and, at times, quite angry Confucian patriarch – laying down in minute detail family stability for the whole nation.

Singapore is keen to spread its brand of happiness elsewhere. In dealing with regimes in the region even more repressive than itself – like Burma – Singapore is an advocate of 'constructive engagement'. Singapore companies continue to invest and make money while governments support one another. Recently a group of Singapore companies including Singapore Airlines set up the Singapore-Myanmar International Leisure Enterprise (SMILE – an appropriate Singapore acronym), a consortium to develop tourism in Burma. Singapore, loaded



Happy faces, happy voices – fun, fun, fun in Singapore's consumer heaven (above). Putting the workers through their paces: transnationals like Mitsubishi find a compliant home in Singapore (below).

PAUL HARRISON / STILL PICTURES

with capital and management expertise but short on natural resources, is a prime candidate for the role of economic colonizer in the region.

It is easy enough from the outside to argue that people should be braver and openly criticize Singapore's repressive policies. But the fear is all-pervasive. Even one political joke told in the wrong place can ruin a career. One Singaporean's comments explain much: 'Boundaries have been drawn on our lives, governing everything from how to live our private lives to how extensively we can participate in the political arena. Through local newspapers, radio, television, the community centres, resident committees, People's Association and the People's Action Party itself, we have been told to have unquestioning faith in our leaders. Even if we don't, many of us will not dare to say so publicly. Those who have challenged the Government have faced imprisonment, torture, loss of all political rights or exile.'

Singapore faces a clear choice of futures: continued control by an authoritarian parent producing citizens lacking autonomy and freedom but materially richer and richer – or, if everything collapses, poorer and poorer. Or, in the context of continued economic planning and development, a new liberation in which free expression of human reason, faith and imagination becomes possible. ■

A day in Utopia

What does a day in Singapore feel like? Earlier this year I spent a couple of days there. The first hurdle is Immigration. Does the computer have any record of my dealings with friends who have been expelled for their 'subversive political activities'? Am I dressed smartly enough? The airport, probably the finest in Asia, is perfectly clean and organized. I try to engage the taxi driver, an Indian, about what it feels like to live in Singapore, as he navigates the perfectly clean taxi through the orderly computer-controlled traffic. He is very cautious, repeating constantly only two sentences: 'It is very expensive here', and 'You have to work hard in Singapore'. Finally the conversation settles on the impossibility of owning a car in Singapore. The cost of a 'certificate of entitlement' now runs to about the same as the cost of the car itself, allowing only the very rich to afford them. At night there is little to do and – unlike Seoul or Bangkok – the streets are empty.

The next morning, not wanting a MacMuffin for breakfast, I set out to find a local restaurant or coffee shop. I walk, block after block, beneath cement-and-steel high-rises – very few people and not a restaurant to be found. Finally, in an old Victorian shophouse, spared from the wrecker's ball and as yet unrenovated, I find a large old Chinese-noodle shop with dirt-stained floors and tables – a bit of the old Singapore. The welcome is warm, the noodles excellent and I feel a bit of liberation – but also some sadness, as I doubt that this shop will survive Singapore's terminal desire for control and gentrification.

I walk on through the high-rises and mansions to my first destination. On an isolated side-street I see a local woman jaywalk and I'm reminded that this is a revolutionary act in Singapore. I meet friends throughout the day. We talk about everything except Singapore. It's just not done – if you are polite and you want to stay. Indeed, one colleague has refused to see me. I suspect it has something to do with my politics and my view of Singapore.

The day's newspaper tells of a new development in Singapore's cultural life – a bit of nudity in a new play. However, the producers, fearing the Government censors, have devised a precaution. Just before the nudity appears a red light flashes on the proscenium so that those who wish may avert their eyes. Do I take this development as a sign of hope? Or of yet more control?

I end the day with a huge Chinese dinner (good food and fascism are not incompatible) with Singaporean and expatriate friends. We talk freely about political situations around Asia but avoid Singapore. I do not want to get my Singaporean friends into trouble. The expatriate friends are looking forward to moving to a country in Indochina where life will be more free and stimulating. So much for a day in Singapore. Boring! ■

PROTECTED PLACE
保護區

Troublemakers beware: Singapore's notion of Asian values brooks no dissent

BORGE TOBIASSON / PANOS

Sue Ann Tellman is the pseudonym for a writer who would still like to be able to get through Singapore immigration.

When nimble fingers make a fist

*All is not well with the women who feed the Asian economic tiger. But, says **Daisy Francis**, they don't always put up with brutal jobs, company goons and male domination.*

On the night of 8 May 1993 a battered body was discovered in the backstreets of Nganjuk in eastern Java. The victim turned out to be a 25-year-old factory worker named Marsinah. She had been savagely beaten and raped. Marsinah had worked at PT Catur Putra Surya, a jointly-owned Indonesian and Swiss concern manufacturing wristwatch components for export. Most of the 500 people who worked there were women and Marsinah had been one of their leaders during a recent strike.

Marsinah's brutal murder turned the unwelcome spotlight of international publicity onto Nanganjuk. An independent inquiry, conducted by a legal-aid institute, found that all the evidence pointed to KODIM, the local military command, as perpetrators of the crime: Marsinah was so severely tortured at the KODIM headquarters that she died at the hands of her torturers.

Her story gives a sense of the brutality that hems in the lives of the women who do the work behind the Asian 'economic miracle'. The walls around the Export

1994
World Events

Here is a list of key events in **1994**, but with a difference
– it presents news from the South which usually goes unnoticed in the North.

&
Magazine Index

The central pages of the **New Internationalist** are devoted to one theme each month. Those for **1994** are listed below. At the end of this supplement you will find an index listing items that have appeared in the magazine during the year, referenced according to subject. The index includes stories that appear in the outside sections of the magazine such as Update and Country Profile.

The central themes for 1994 were:

January	**251**	**Mexico**	Through the Tortilla Curtain
February	**252**	**Prostitution**	Soliciting for change
March	**253**	**East Timor**	The silence and the betrayal
April	**254**	**Northeast Brazil**	Death without weeping
May	**255**	**Northern Ireland**	The fire and the future
June	**256**	**Media**	Spiked! The stories that don't make the news
July	**257**	**World Bank, IMF**	50 years is enough
August	**258**	**Beirut**	Selling the peace
September	**259**	**Filthy Rich!**	The new robber barons
October	**260**	**Race**	Unlocking prejudice
November	**261**	**The Arms Trade**	Lethal lies
December	**262**	**United Nations at 50**	Winds of change

THE NI NEW INTERNATIONALIST

Copies of all of **1994's** issues are still available for purchase. To obtain magazines from previous years please see the back of this supplement.

1994

... as seen from the perspective of the South.

Our media feed us news dominated by rich-world events and preoccupations. Here the **NI** redresses the balance with an alternative view of the year's key events.

DECEMBER 1993

WORLD The conclusion of a GATT deal on world trade is welcomed in the West but gets an angry reception in many developing countries.

CHILE Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei wins the presidential election by a landslide.

HAITI The Clinton Administration backs away from efforts to restore President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

IVORY COAST President Felix Houphouet-Boigny, leader since independence, dies.

BURUNDI At least a hundred people die in inter-ethnic violence.

ANGOLA The rebel movement UNITA boycotts peace talks with the Government.

TURKEY The daily newspaper *Ozgur Gundem* is struggling for survival after publishing Kurdish views. Ten staff have been killed in the past year and all the editors are in detention.

NORTHERN IRELAND The British and Irish governments issue a joint declaration opening a door to peaceful settlement of the conflict.

JANUARY 1994

MEXICO In Chiapas a 'Zapatista' peasant uprising against the Government takes over six towns. Thousands of troops are deployed against them.

BURMA The main rebel group decides to talk peace following pressure from Thailand.

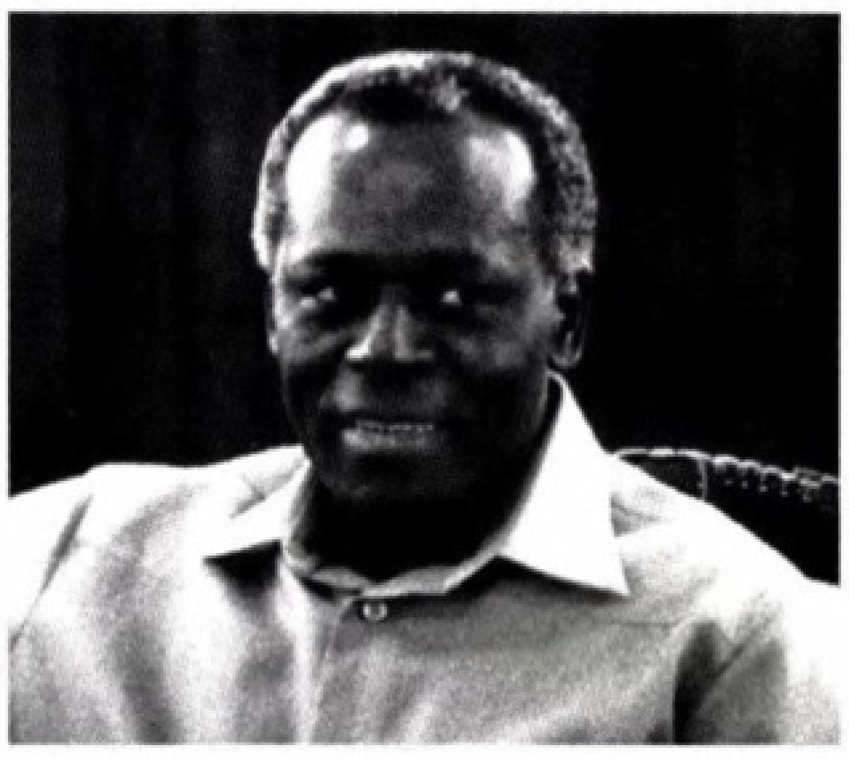
INDIA temporarily halts work on the controversial Narmada Dam. 55 coalminers in Newkenda are gassed to death following a fire. The release of the 'bandit queen' Phoolan Devi is announced.

SRI LANKA The opposition Freedom Party unearths three mass graves inside a police camp. The victims could be 300 of the 30,000 who went 'missing' during the war against communist insurgents in 1989-90.

SOMALIA Traditional and religious leaders in Mogadishu hold secret talks aimed at a peace deal.

PAKISTAN The first all-woman police station opens.

ANGOLA President dos Santos admits his country is surviving 'solely on international charity'.



BANGLADESH Tribal refugees from the Chittagong Hill tracts are set to return from their camps in India over the coming year.

PHILIPPINES The Moro National Liberation Front declare a ceasefire. The separatist war has killed 50,000 people since the 1970s.

ALGERIA General Liamine Zeroual is appointed President.

FEBRUARY

SOMALIA US troops kill at least five Somalis.

SOUTH AFRICA Nelson Mandela assures white farmers their land will not be nationalized.

INDONESIA More than 2000 people flee after Mount Semaru erupts in eastern Java.

BANGLADESH Some 56,000 Chakma refugees are told they must make an unwilling return to Bangladesh from their camps in north-east India. Their lands are still controlled by the Bangladeshi Army and Muslim settlers.

ANGOLA At least 175 die as UNITA attacks Cuito city. More than 1,000 Angolans are still dying daily in the civil war.

ALGERIA 116 police die in two weeks of the civil war.

GHANA More than 6,000 people flee into Togo from northern Ghana following ethnic clashes. 1,000 people are estimated to have died.

KENYA President Daniel Arap Moi urges wealthy Kenyans to donate food for thousands made hungry by prolonged debt.

SUDAN Over 100,000 people are on the move in southern Sudan, fleeing attacks by roving armed bands and a government offensive against rebel forces.

ETHIOPIA Scientist Dr Yilma gifts to his country the rinderpest vaccine he developed which could save cattle rearers millions of dollars.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE Jordan and the PLO pledge an open border policy and economic co-operation. 43 worshippers at a mosque in Hebron are gunned down by Jewish militant Baruch Goldstein.

INDONESIA An earthquake in Sumatra kills 184.

HAITI At least 24 people en route to Florida are feared drowned after their vessel sinks.

BOSNIA Dule Tadic, a Bosnian Serb, is jailed in Germany for abetting genocide. Bosnian Serbs begin a large-scale withdrawal of guns from around Sarajevo to avert NATO air strikes.

MARCH

SOUTH AFRICA Inkatha agrees to register for the election. Armed white right-wingers are routed after skirmishes in Bophuthatswana.

WORLD The World Health Organization claims bubonic plague is making a comeback.

BURUNDI Up to 1,000 people are killed in clashes between the majority Hutu and minority Tutsi.

ALGERIA Women's groups lead over 50,000 people at a rally protesting at political assassinations and threats against unveiled women by fundamentalists. At least 900 prisoners, mostly Islamic militants, are freed by 150 commandos. Within a week 64 of the escapees are killed by security forces.

AFRICA Central African leaders appeal for help for their economies following a 50-per-cent devaluation of the French African franc.

HAITI 70 are killed in new repression of Aristide supporters.

SOMALIA A cholera epidemic inflicts further suffering. More than 1,700 cases are reported.

SRI LANKA Tamil rebels massacre 22 fisherpeople.

ZIMBABWE Land taken from white farmers has gone to government officials instead of the poor.

MEXICO is thrown into political turmoil by the assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio, presidential candidate of the ruling Institutional Revolution Party.

PAKISTAN The authorities state they will give free legal aid to women victims of abuse.

UGANDA The first election for 14 years has no political parties: candidates must stand as individuals.

GUATEMALA The Government and leftist rebels sign a human-rights accord which boosts the hopes of ending years of civil war.

TURKEY The Turkish Army begins a massive offensive against Kurdish guerrillas in south-east Turkey and northern Iraq involving 300,000 troops. The earth ends up scorched and the jails full.

APRIL

INDIA Police clash violently with 100,000 demonstrators protesting against GATT in New Delhi.

RWANDA The presidents of Rwanda and neighbouring Burundi are killed when their plane is shot down over the Rwandan capital, Kigali. Rwanda's prime minister is murdered the next day along with 10 Belgian UN soldiers and thousands of ordinary people. UN troops fly out. The majority Hutus turn on Tutsis all over the country, massacring as many as 200,000. More than 500,000 refugees move into Tanzania. The Tutsi-dominated Rwanda Patriotic Front advances towards the capital.

INDONESIA faces the worst riots for seven years as factory workers agitate for higher wages.

SWITZERLAND The Swiss justice minister announces plans to deport about 11,000 Sri Lankan asylum seekers.

ECUADOR Fires on the Galapagos islands threaten its famous giant tortoises.

WORLD The WHO singles out inequality as the real culprit for the relentless rise in malnutrition and disease in the Third World.

SOUTH AFRICA A bomb kills 12 in an effort to derail the elections.

MAY

SRI LANKA The economy is booming despite the continuing civil war in the north – growth is now at 6.9 per cent.

KENYA 272 die in the country's worst ferry tragedy.

SOUTH AFRICA The ANC under Nelson Mandela's leadership wins 62 per cent of the vote in the South African elections.

BANGLADESH A cyclone kills 150, but is considerably less devastating than past cyclones.

CAMBODIA Khmer Rouge officials rape and behead up to 10 wives of government soldiers.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat sign an accord on Palestinian self-rule. Muslim gunmen shoot dead two Jewish settlers. Israel withdraws militarily from the Gaza Strip.

YEMEN The civil war intensifies, threatening to redivide the country. South Yemenis acknowledge military gains made by north Yemeni forces, but vow to resist further encroachments by the government of General Ali Saleh.

HAITI The US announces it will stop sending fleeing Haitians home without an asylum hearing. The installation of an interim president – Emile Jonassaint – puts the island's military leaders on a collision course with the US, which is backing Aristide's return.

PANAMA Millionaire Ernesto Pere Balladares is elected President.

MALAWI Bakili Muluzi is elected President of Malawi, ending the more-than-30-year rule of Hastings Kamuzu Banda.

SAUDI ARABIA About 200 pilgrims die in a stampede during the annual *haj* to Mecca.

KENYA Kenya's currency becomes fully convertible for most transactions.

CHINA The US decides to renew China's most favoured nation trading status and to delink trade and human rights. In the wake of this the Beijing Government tightens the screw on dissent.

JUNE

BANGLADESH Feminist writer Taslima Nasreen goes into hiding to avoid arrest for 'blasphemy'. She had said the Quran is out of date. Thousands pour through the streets demanding her hanging and fundamentalist groups issue a *fatwa* and offer a $1,000 reward to anyone who kills her. Around 50 Muslim snake charmers threaten to release 10,000 snakes in the capital Dhaka unless she is hanged.

SOUTH AFRICA rejoins the Commonwealth.

INDIA A heat wave kills over 400 people. Villagers living on the banks of the Narmada are forcibly evacuated by police before the rising waters submerge their huts behind the Sardar Sarovar Dam.

LEBANON An Israeli air attack kills up to 45 members of Hizbollah.

ZAIRE is suspended by the IMF after failing to pay its debt. It owes $315 million.

ANGOLA Fierce fighting breaks out between the Angolan Government and UNITA rebels killing 103 civilians.

THAILAND Testing of an American AIDS vaccine begins on 30 Thai volunteers.

COLOMBIA More than 1,000 people die in an earthquake which devastates the Paez river valley.

RWANDA The RPF rebels continue their advance. A French military force intervenes with UN approval but amid deep concern about French connections with the former Hutu regime. The death toll now stands at 500,000.

ALBANIA Gays form their first association to promote their rights.

KENYA Reports reveal that up to 1,000 members of a tribe in the Turkana region have been killed in a series of massacres over the past three years. The remaining 350,000 are being driven into lands too dry to support them.

YEMEN The bombardment of Aden by northern Yemeni forces kills 200 and leaves 700 wounded. Russia brokers a ceasefire.

SOUTH AFRICA An oil slick strikes South Africa's Cape coast, killing or driving away two-thirds of the birds on Dassen Island, an important breeding ground of the endangered Jackass Penguin.

NIGERIA Police battle with supporters of millionaire Moshood Abiola, winner of the election nullified by the military a year ago, who has now proclaimed himself President in defiance of the Government.

JULY

BRAZIL The *real* is the new currency, set at parity with the US dollar. The hope is that it will reduce inflation of 50 per cent a month.

RWANDA French army commanders in Rwanda are working closely with officials implicated in the murder and persecution of Tutsis.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE Yasser Arafat returns to Gaza after his long exile. He vows to delete calls for the destruction of Israel from the Palestinian charter.

TURKEY Demonstrations are held in all Turkey's major cities in support of continuing secularism, now under fire from fundamentalists.

INDONESIA President Suharto bans three of the few relatively uncensored magazines.

ETHIOPIA The ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front wins a landslide victory in the first national elections. It aims for a decentralized democracy based on a voluntary association of ethnic states. The main opposition groups boycotted the election.

YEMEN Government forces retake Aden and crush the breakaway republic.

RWANDA The rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front take the capital Kigali, forming a new government headed by two Hutus and claimed to be on non-ethnic lines. But two million fearful Hutu refugees cross the border into Goma, Zaire, creating a humanitarian catastrophe. The refugees are hit by hunger and cholera as UNHCR and charities find it impossible to cope with the numbers. At its peak the cholera epidemic claims 1,500 lives a day.

BOSNIA A Government offensive leads Serb commanders to round up Muslim and Croat civilians in occupied areas and send them to the frontline trenches.

WORLD The 50th anniversary of the Bretton Woods conference that set up the World Bank and the IMF. The NI joins those crying '50 years is enough!'

GUATEMALA Coffee workers win a 45-per-cent increase and are promised better conditions after their first-ever direct negotiations with the industry élite.

HAITI The Military Government orders a team of UN human-rights observers to leave the country.

NIGERIA A one-day general strike takes place in solidarity with oil workers defying the military regime of General Abacha.

EAST TIMOR 20 people are injured as Indonesian security forces attack a student demonstration.

INDIA Monsoon floods and mudslides kill at least 560 people and ruin crops and houses – five years of drought have now been followed by eight years of floods.

NORTH KOREA Stalinist dictator Kim Il Sung dies.

SOUTH AFRICA is welcomed back into the Commonwealth.

BANGLADESH Garment exporters ban child labour to avert a boycott by Western buyers.

BURUNDI Clashes between the majority Hutu and the minority Tutsi claim the lives of 200 people.

BRITAIN bows to international pressure and announces a moratorium on the export of landmines.

AUGUST

RWANDA A virulent strain of dysentery emerges as the new killer in the refugee camps. France withdraws its troops.

COLOMBIA Ernesto Samper takes over as President. Manuel Cepeda Vargas, a prominent left-wing leader, is shot dead.

EGYPT A row erupts between the Education Ministry, which has banned girls from wearing veils in school without their parents' permission, and the Ministry of Religious Endowment. The courts overturn the ban.

BURUNDI Police fight with young protesters as strikes shut down the capital Bujumbura. Fears of ethnic conflict on Rwandan lines mount.

FRANCE cracks down on suspected Algerian Islamic fundamentalists, arresting 109 people and banning five Muslim journals.

BURMA The military junta is using prisoners in chains to clean up the country for tourists. Tens of thousands of ethnic-minority people are treated as slave labour, building a 150-kilometre railway in the south.

BANGLADESH Feminist author Taslima Nasreen flees secretly to safety in Sweden.

CHAD The Government signs a peace agreement with Christian rebels in the south.

PHILIPPINES Hundreds of thousands of Catholics demonstrate against the free availability of contraceptives.

INDIA Indian parents whose children work in hazardous conditions are to be paid to send them to school. The population program which has sterilized 4.1 million in a year is criticized for offering poor and illiterate women land, houses or loans in return.

GUATEMALA The party of former dictator General Rios Montt sweeps to election victory, promising to stamp out crime and corruption.

PERU Susana Higuchi accuses her husband President Alberto Fujimori's cabinet of corruption and says there is a campaign to have her declared insane. She is stripped of her duties but says she will run for President against her husband next year.

SRI LANKA The left-wing People's Alliance, headed by Chandrika Kumaranatunga, daughter of the Bandaranaike dynasty, wins a narrow election victory.

NIGERIA The oil strike continues. General Abacha dissolves the trade-union leadership. Security forces shut down a leading independent newspaper. Opposition leader and novelist Ken Saro-Wiwa, in jail for four months, is reported to have been repeatedly beaten and kept in leg-irons.

CHINA Paramount Leader Deng Xiaoping turns 90, still hanging onto power. Typhoon Fred devastates the coastal region of Zhejiang, killing at least 900 and destroying half a million homes. China is accused of using executed convicts for organ transplants.

BRAZIL A new invasion of the Yanomami reserve in the northern Amazon by 10,000 armed gold miners is timed for the pre-election period when politicians' thoughts are elsewhere.

MEXICO The Institutional Revolutionary Party, in power for 65 years, confounds predictions by winning another election victory.

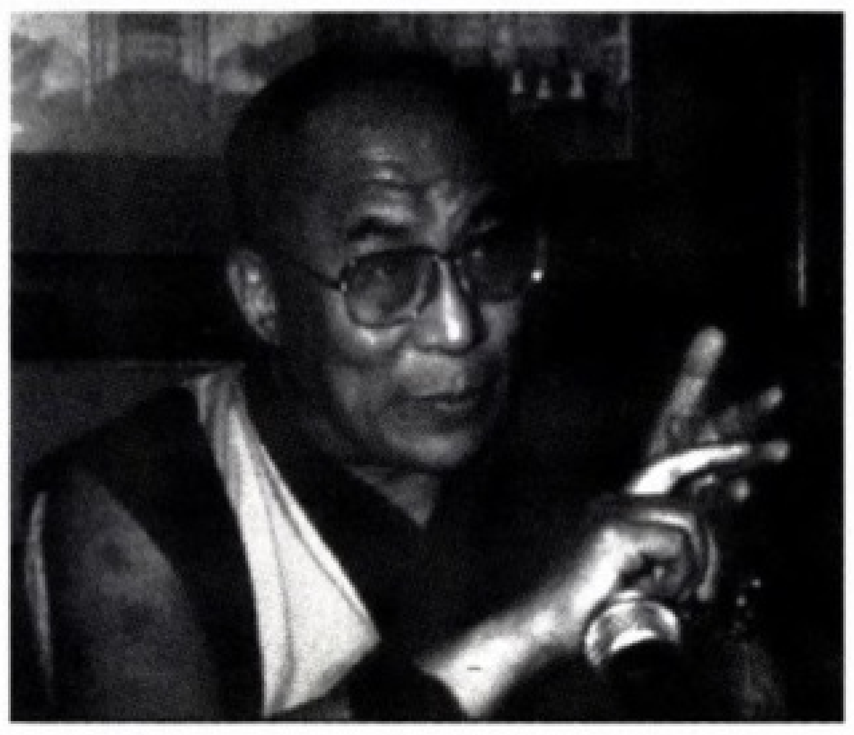
UNITED STATES A heavy influx of Cuban 'boat people' leads the US to turn away illegal immigrants. Over 3,000 refugees are put behind barbed wire at the US naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

SOMALILAND Still seeking international recognition, the four-year-old country launches its own currency.

NORTHERN IRELAND The Provisional IRA announces a complete cessation of hostilities.

SEPTEMBER

TIBET The Dalai Lama warns China that Tibetans may turn to armed struggle if their oppression continues to worsen, lamenting his own failure to win change by moderate means.



PHILIPPINES 69 miners die in an underground explosion: negligence is the suspected cause.

CHINA signs an accord with Russia, resolving their last dispute over the border.

WORLD The UN Population Conference in Cairo faces an onslaught from a Vatican-Muslim alliance but is successful in switching the population debate to an emphasis on women's education and reproductive health.

NIGERIA The oil workers' strike collapses leaving forces opposed to military rule in disarray. The regime gives itself sweeping new powers of arrest.

EAST TIMOR The Indonesian Army holds talks with jailed guerrilla leader Xanana Gusmao.

UNITED STATES Cuban refugees are moved to camps in Panama. An accord is reached with Havana on immigration levels but the economic embargo remains.

ALGERIA President Liamine Zeroual acknowledges that 10,000 have died in the violence of the last 30 months. The top two leaders of the Islamic Salvation Front are released from jail into house arrest. Militants behead 16 civilians as a signal they oppose dialogue with the Government. Berbers stage a general strike protesting against both the Government and fundamentalists. Popular singer Cheb Hasni is shot dead.

SUDAN Peace talks on the 11-year civil war collapse as the Islamic military government refuses to drop *sharia* law and allow self-determination for the South.

BANGLADESH Thousands block railways and roads calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

ZAIRE announces it will shut more than half its missions abroad because it cannot afford to pay diplomats or bills.

AFGHANISTAN The International Committee of the Red Cross claims the conflict is killing as many as it did before the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 – 1,100 in September alone.

CHILE Left-wingers plunge the capital Santiago into darkness by felling a power pylon on the anniversary of the coup that overthrew Salvador Allende in 1974.

IRAQ A crowd angered by the new punishment for draft-dodgers and deserters storm the HQ of the ruling Baath party in al-Amarah and apply the punishment to officials there by cutting off their ears.

SOMALIA The last US marines leave after 21 months. Fighting between the warlords continues unabated. The UN threatens to withdraw all its forces.

RUSSIA The President of the breakaway republic of Chechnya declares martial law as the Russian-backed opposition blows up a television tower.

HAITI Threatened by a massive US invasion force, military leaders agree at the last minute to allow US forces to occupy the country and prepare for Aristide's return.

BURMA Military rulers meet opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi for the first time since her house arrest five years ago following her landslide election victory.

BOSNIA The heaviest fighting for seven months hits Sarajevo. Bosnian Serbs step up their 'ethnic cleansing' campaign, evicting 2,000 Muslims from their homes.

INDIA Plague breaks out in Maharashtra then spreads rapidly to the western town of Surat, from which half a million people flee in terror, the biggest human flight since Partition in 1947. The plague spreads to Delhi and Calcutta before it is stemmed.

MALAYSIA Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad tells Western environmentalists to mind their own business as he opens the Bakun Dam project in Sarawak, due to be twice as big as Egypt's Aswan Dam and to flood an area larger than Singapore.

RWANDA The UN refugee agency claims Hutu refugees who returned home from Zaire have been killed by Tutsis, including Government forces. The UN Secretary-General gags all UN officials from spreading this report.

SOUTH AFRICA Zulu leader Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi bursts into an on-air TV studio with armed bodyguards to attack a political opponent. Archbishop Tutu criticizes the high living standards of government ministers.

CHINA In one of a series of public mass executions, 45 people are convicted and immediately executed in Wuhan. Another 31 such executions take place as part of the lead-in to China's National Day.

OCTOBER

WORLD The annual IMF-World Bank meeting in Madrid is deluged by calls for fundamental reform.

INDIA An explosion in a fireworks factory kills 26 people, most of them small children.

BRAZIL Social democrat Fernando Henrique Cardoso wins the Presidential election saying his biggest task is 'to overcome our social injustice'.

KAZAKHSTAN Environmentalists issue a death certificate for the polluted Aral Sea, which has shrunk by two-thirds in 20 years and has already split in two.

TURKEY Security forces raze 17 villages in another offensive against rebel Kurds.

IRAQ moves troops to the Kuwaiti border. The US and its allies send warships to the region and Saddam Hussein removes the troops. The UN votes to maintain crippling economic sanctions.

VIETNAM seeks international aid for 500,000 people affected by floods, especially in the Mekong Delta. The Government announces it will join the Association of South-East Asian Nations next year.

HAITI Military leaders including General Raoul Cedras fly into exile. President Aristide returns home.

CHINA announces it will have at least one woman at every level in government bodies by 2000. Two leading human-rights activists are sentenced to three years of 're-education through labour'. A law is passed prohibiting those with serious mental disabilities or contagious diseases from marrying.

ST LUCIA The Caribbean island loses 68 per cent of its banana crop in a tropical storm.

GUATEMALA Violence and human-rights abuses reach a peak just before UN monitors arrive.

NORTHERN IRELAND Loyalist paramilitary groups announce a ceasefire and offer 'abject remorse' to innocent victims.

SRI LANKA Government officials and Tamil Tiger rebels meet for the first time in Jaffna following the lifting of the economic embargo on Tamil areas. The opposition candidate in presidential elections who opposes the peace talks is among 50 people killed by a bomb.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE The anti-Arafat group Hamas launches a suicide bomb attack on an Israeli commuter bus, killing 22. Israel signs a peace agreement with Jordan, ending 46 years of enmity.

EGYPT Nobel Prize-winning author Naguib Mahfouz is stabbed by a Muslim militant.

RWANDA Amnesty confirms that the new government's troops have systematically killed civilians. Former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere issues a report saying UN Security Council permanent members armed the regime responsible for the original genocide. Hutu militias seize control of food distribution in the biggest refugee camp.

SOUTH AFRICA A modern shopping mall opens in Soweto, drawing both jeers and cheers. The Government says people continuing rent boycotts, an old anti-apartheid tactic, will be evicted.

ALGERIA An Amnesty report puts the death toll in the three years of civil war at 20,000, blaming extrajudicial executions and torture by security forces as well as guerrilla killings. The rebels step up the war, attacking an oil installation for the first time. Direct talks between the two sides fail.

AFRICA Gorillas and chimpanzees could face extinction because they are being killed for food. 'Bush meat' is a delicacy in Central and West Africa.

NICARAGUA One of the Sandinistas' original 'poet-priests', Ernesto Cardenal, resigns from the left-wing opposition party in protest at the control of hardliners.

PHILIPPINES Imelda Marcos offers $27 million to compensate victims of human-rights abuses during her husband's rule.

BANGLADESH The Government of Khaleda Zia holds talks with the Opposition, which has boycotted parliament since March in protest at alleged local-election fraud. Deposed President Ershad and two air-force chiefs are charged with misappropriating $20 million. The Government offers a free TV to anyone turning in 10,000 dead rats – a campaign to resist the plague epidemic in neighbouring India.

WORLD Developing countries are deprived of at least five billion dollars a year in royalties for plants and local know-how given to multinational corporations, says the UN. Red Cross hopes for a global ban on anti-personnel mines are dashed as Britain and other arms exporters denounce the plan as 'utopian'.

CAMBODIA The Khmer Rouge massacre 46 villagers.

NOVEMBER

MOZAMBIQUE The first election in its history gives victory to the Frelimo Government but sees a strong minority showing by Renamo, especially in the north. Renamo accepts the result and vows not to return to war.

ANGOLA After a month of intense fighting the Government and the UNITA sign a peace agreement – but not the two sides' leaders.

MIDDLE EAST Arab, Israeli and Western leaders agree at a summit in Casablanca to launch a Middle East and North African Development Bank.

BRITAIN The World Development Movement celebrates a victory as the High Court rules illegal the Government's use of £234 million ($350 million) overseas aid money to fund the Pergau Dam in Malaysia as a *quid pro quo* for a major arms sale.

WESTERN SAHARA Floods drive out 55,000 from refugee camps in Algeria. The Western Saharan refugees are waiting for the UN to act on the referendum promised to them. King Hassan of Morocco says if the referendum opts for independence he will go back to war.

SOMALIA Warlords Ali Mahdi and Farah Aideed set up opposing 'governments'.

BOSNIA The Bosnian Government's offensive against the Serbs meets with initial success but rebounds as Serb forces attack the 'safe haven' of Bihac.

SOUTH AFRICA 2,000 former ANC soldiers are expelled from the national army after walking out in protest at pay, conditions and white officers' racism.

TAJIKISTAN Mr Rakhmonov wins the first presidential election.

SRI LANKA Chandrika Kumaratunga wins the presidential election and immediately installs her mother Sirima Bandaranaike as Prime Minister.

RUSSIA All foreign visitors must now be tested for HIV.

INDIA 5,000 eunuchs in Delhi win the vote.

INDONESIA hosts heads of state at the Asian Pacific Economic Conference. A clampdown on dissent preceded the summit. The Suharto regime is embarrassed by strikes like that by 40,000 workers at the Adidas factory near Jakarta and by riots in the East Timor capital Dili. East Timorese students who occupied the US Embassy in Jakarta seek asylum in Portugal.

SOMALILAND Secessionist rebels attack the capital Hargeisa.

NIGERIA Nobel Prize-winning writer Wole Soyinka flees into exile to publicize his country's plight.

NEPAL The Communists win the election but pledge support for the monarchy and the free market.

EGYPT plans an expressway between the Pyramids.

MEXICO Ernesto Zedillo takes over as President.

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HEINE PEDERSEN / STILL PICTURES

Processing Zones, the EPZs, are often topped with barbed wire. The places resemble huge labour camps. Inside them you find the women who were the linchpin of the first phase of the industrialization process in South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and now south China and Indonesia.

The women come here when it's boom-time, 'to perform their national duty' and work in the factories. But come 'recession' or 'relocation' and the welcome mat gets yanked in. Then they are reminded of their responsibility to home and children.

These women are still regarded – often even by themselves – as a secondary or subsidiary work-force. In Hong Kong – where nearly all low-wage production has moved into the EPZs of South China – uneducated women workers in their forties and fifties have been left behind as employment shifts to financial services and communications.

The EPZ economy is based on employing cheap labour for the assembly of high-volume standardized components. Such work is seen as particularly suited to women. Since the 1960s young women have been employed in EPZ factories on a large scale. They comprise the majority of child labour, often spending most of their teenage years in sweatshops making plastic toys or garments. By the 1970s they had moved on to more sophisticated assembly lines – particularly electronics and pharmaceuticals. By 1982, of the 62,617 workers employed in EPZs in Taiwan 85 per cent were women, three-quarters of them under 30 years of age. The *Investor's Guide* in Taipei trumpets the advantages of hiring women workers: wage rates fixed at 10 to 20 per cent below those of men (and as much as 50 per cent in some Korean firms); a malleable workforce that won't cause trouble.

Such hints did not fall on deaf ears. Companies sent tour buses to rural villages to persuade inexperienced young girls to leave home. A system of recruitment from junior high schools was approved by the Education Department – the jobs turned out to be a poor substitute for education. Simple assembly tasks left the women with few transferable skills.

Ah Lai is 18 years old. She has worked in Hsin Kwong Textile Factory, Taiwan, for three years. She is the eldest child in a family of five. She left school and started to work in this factory when she had to shoulder responsibility for the family. From the very beginning she hated the work. She had to stand all day. The noise and the air pollution were unbearable. Then she lost a hand in an industrial accident. The insurance company paid her $5,800 as compensation.

'After I recovered I returned to work,' she says. 'The management put me in the same place, doing the same job. There was no rehabilitation training and the work was hard. I cried a lot.'

But that was not the hardest blow. A buyer visited the factory and Ah Lai was told to change her place and work somewhere more hidden. She asked why. 'Look at your hand. It's not good to let the guest see it. We would lose face,' replied the supervisor. 'So the company thinks that my crippled hand is a shame on the company. But why did this happen to me? Who brought me to this?' asks Ah Lai.

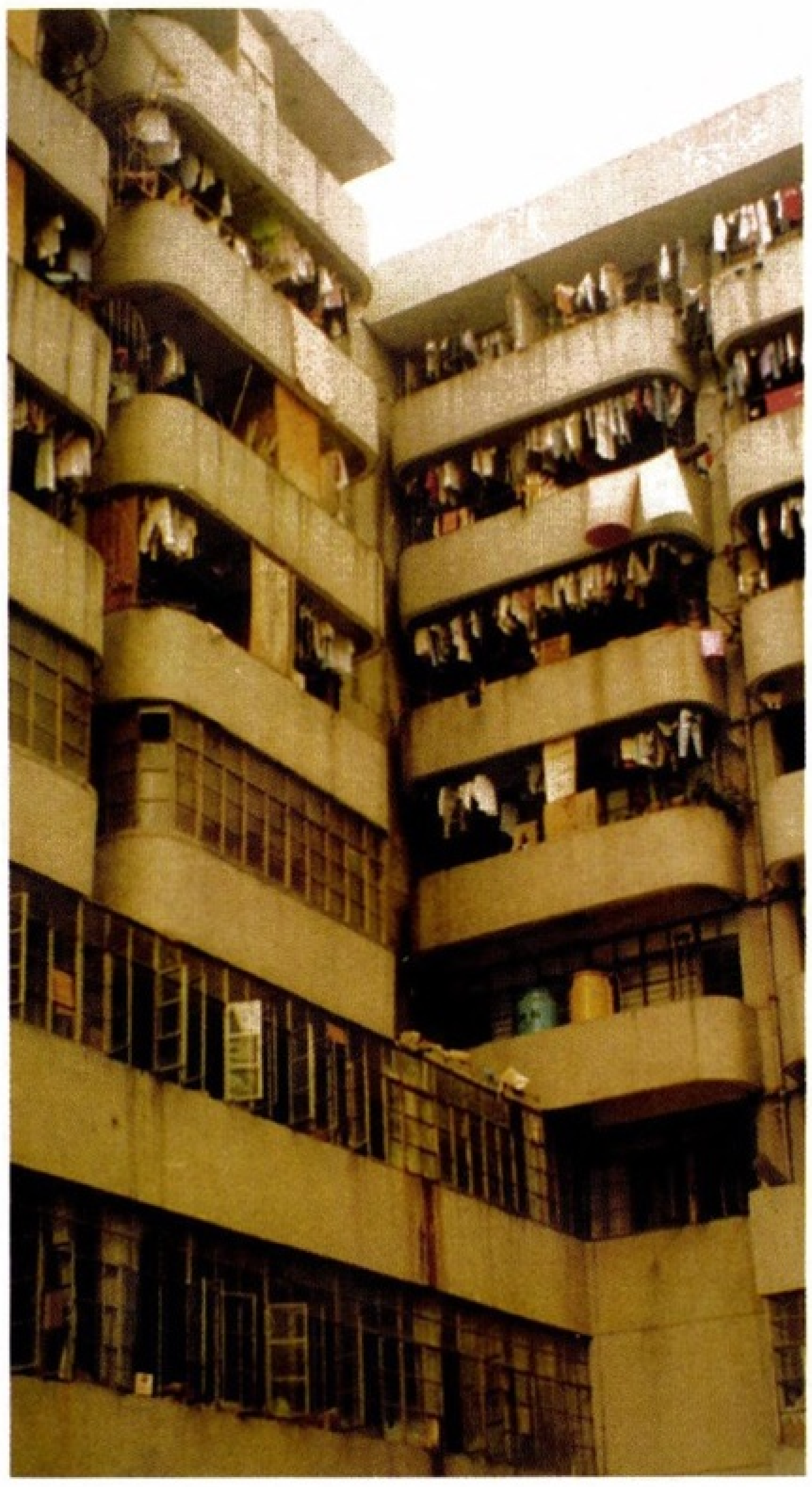
Young women like her are under considerable pressure to contribute to the family income. Eldest daughters are expected to carry much of the responsibility for the education and welfare of younger sisters and brothers.

In the end Ah Lai had to swallow her pride and continue working at Hsin Kwong Textile.

EPZ jobs do offer some young women a way to escape restrictive social roles. But the zones have their own stringent social controls. The dormitories where the women live, as well as the factories themselves, are tightly supervised. There are few opportunities to socialize with young men. Security officers monitor workers during their non-working as well as working hours. In a typical dormitory there are six women to a room. Each room is made up of single beds or bunk beds and a shared common table or two. There is almost no space for personal belongings.

In the south China EPZs fires have killed hundreds of workers who had been locked into their factories and dormitories. Some of these casualties, most of them women, occurred in illegal 'three-in-one' factories. Here workers live on the top floors with the storage facilities while production carries on downstairs – giving new meaning to the phrase 'living for your work'. One such fire burned 80 young female workers to death in the Xingye raincoat factory in Dongguan in 1991. The fire started on the bottom floors while the women were sleeping in their quarters on the top. In 1993 nearly 2,500 workers were burned to death in Chinese factory fires.

Many women workers are unaware of their rights and the existence of labour



ASIA MONITOR RESOURCE CENTRE

Fire-trap for China's women workers: an illegal 3-in-1 factory – production, warehouse, dormitory – in a south China free-trade zone.

laws. They are raised to be quiet, gentle and subservient and thus do not 'speak out'. They live in fear of blacklisting. The names of 'troublesome' employees are circulated among all employers. Unionization in Asian countries is difficult, with tight government curbs on independent organizing and the repression of labour groups. The problem is compounded by the marginal position of women within most unions themselves. Even in otherwise progressive circles, the notion that it is for 'men to master the outside world' continues to prevail.

Women active in organizing other workers often have to confront those all-too-familiar derogatory remarks from male fellow-workers. This despite the fact that in South Korea in the 1970s, for example, women textile workers led the first wave of militant unionism.

One important and bitter struggle was at the Dong-Il Textile Company. Han Myeing-Sook, who is today one of the leaders of Korea Women's Association United, says she will never forget the day 70 women from Dong-Il Textile stood nude, forming a human wall in front of riot police – a very startling act in socially conservative Korea. The women were pelted with human excrement by company goons and male workers.

Dong-Il was just one of dozens of struggles led by Korean women workers. Nonetheless, since the struggles of the 1970s, it is male workers and their concerns that have come to dominate the Korean movement.

Throughout industrializing Asia, women activists have faced being called 'loose women' simply because of their union activities. Activists tend to be single women in their twenties, who may have completed only five or six years of primary schooling. They will tell you that the reason for their activism is that working and living conditions are so bad they have nothing to lose in the fight for a better deal.

Regrettably, some feminist movements in the region are too preoccupied with issues of middle-class career advancement to be of much use to working women. Young women from most of the Newly Industrializing Countries have, for their part, been slow to break free from their upbringing to take the hard road of union activism.

The obstacles to union activism are formidable. Union leaders are now being sued for strike actions. Arunee Srito, a well-known Thai woman activist, was one of those targeted by management at Thai Durable Textile for a strike in July 1993. Arunee, the chairperson of the Textile, Garment, Leather Trade Unions' Federation, which has 26 textile-union affiliates, was a key leader in a maternity-leave campaign. She was also a member of the support committee for the Kader toy factory victims when she was dismissed – Kader was the site of one of the worst factory fires in Bangkok. The textile industry employs predominantly women workers and Arunee's leadership had inspired many other women workers to join up. Management desperately wanted to break growing union militancy.

Thai Durable Textile decided to sue Arunee and five other union leaders for obstruction of production, which it claimed had led to a loss of at least $4.16 million by the company. The case is expected to reach court soon. This is the first time that a company has taken workers or unions to court over industrial action in Thailand.

If all else fails employers threaten to relocate their operations when workers press for higher wages and better working conditions. Among the many Asian nations – Indonesia, Vietnam, south China – aspiring to follow the development path taken by their more successful neighbours, there are sites of almost unfettered exploitation. The governments of these countries offer up their citizens – and particularly their women – as their cheapest and most abundant resource. ■

Daisy Francis is an Asian-Canadian and a member of staff with the Canada/Asia working group in Toronto.

Pig village and the slaughter house

The slums of Seoul, South Korea, are hard to find while in Bangkok, Thailand, they're hard to miss – but the slum-dwellers of both have plenty in common.

The slums of Seoul are, by and large, hidden affairs. This city of over ten million has the appearance of a slightly threadbare metropolis of the industrial world. 'Pig Village' is on the eastern outskirts of the city. Corrugated shacks jammed between a high-rise development and an expressway are home to about 3,500 people. Yet you can walk through them in just 10 minutes.

It is always an education to meet the people who live in Third World slums. The way the Western press 'massifies' such

people as an undifferentiated hoard of victims leads one to forget the obvious – they are people with hopes and dreams, good days and bad days, just like the rest of us.

Mrs Oh moved here 12 years ago, just when Pig Village was making the transition from livestock storage to human habitation. She says in the first couple of years she thought the constant smell of the animals in her nostrils would drive her mad. The smell was washed away by a flood – 'the only time I have ever been glad for a flood'. Mr Lee has lived for 10 years in Pig Village and says he has never locked his door.

They both tell the story of a 12-year-old boy temporarily housed here while his family waited for reassignment to a high-rise. Once the move had been made he kept coming back to Pig Village each day after school. When asked which place he preferred his answer was philosophical: 'Housing better there – living better here'.

Both Mrs Oh and Mr Lee agree that this community of narrow passages and cramped, poorly-lit rooms has a strong collective sense of itself. Some of the small living spaces are home to as many as five or six people. Most are immaculately clean. Heating (Korea has very harsh winters) is through hot-water pipes that run under the floor. This is so effective that as we talked I had to keep shifting my seat as the floor became uncomfortably hot under me. Electricity and clean water supplies are erratic.

RICHARD SWIFT

Both of them also feel that the sense of community spirit or *Chong* – a Korean word meaning 'warmth for one another' – has dissipated since 1987, the year the Olympics came to Seoul. House prices in the area have shot up sevenfold since then. Now rents are going up, people are being divided into 'legals' and 'illegals' (only 15 per cent are said to be 'legal') by a government which is dividing the community against itself.

Despite a modern gloss of fancy luxury hotels and 'air-con' buses Bangkok is still very much a Third World city. Here you can't miss the slums. The largest of them all is the downtown area of Klong-toey, near the port.

It is here you find the Catholic-run Human Development Centre and a man known to Bangkok as 'Father Joe'. Unusually for a missionary and social activist, Joe Maier from South Dakota lives right in a part of Klong-toey called 'Slaughterhouse' that is populated by Christians who are engaged in the killing of pigs – a practice long prohibited to Buddhists.

Mrs Oh – 'I thought the pig smell would drive me mad' (above).
Desolation Row – Klong Toey after the fire. Tragedy for some, but opportunity for land-hungry real-estate speculators (below).

ASIA MONITOR RESOURCE CENTRE

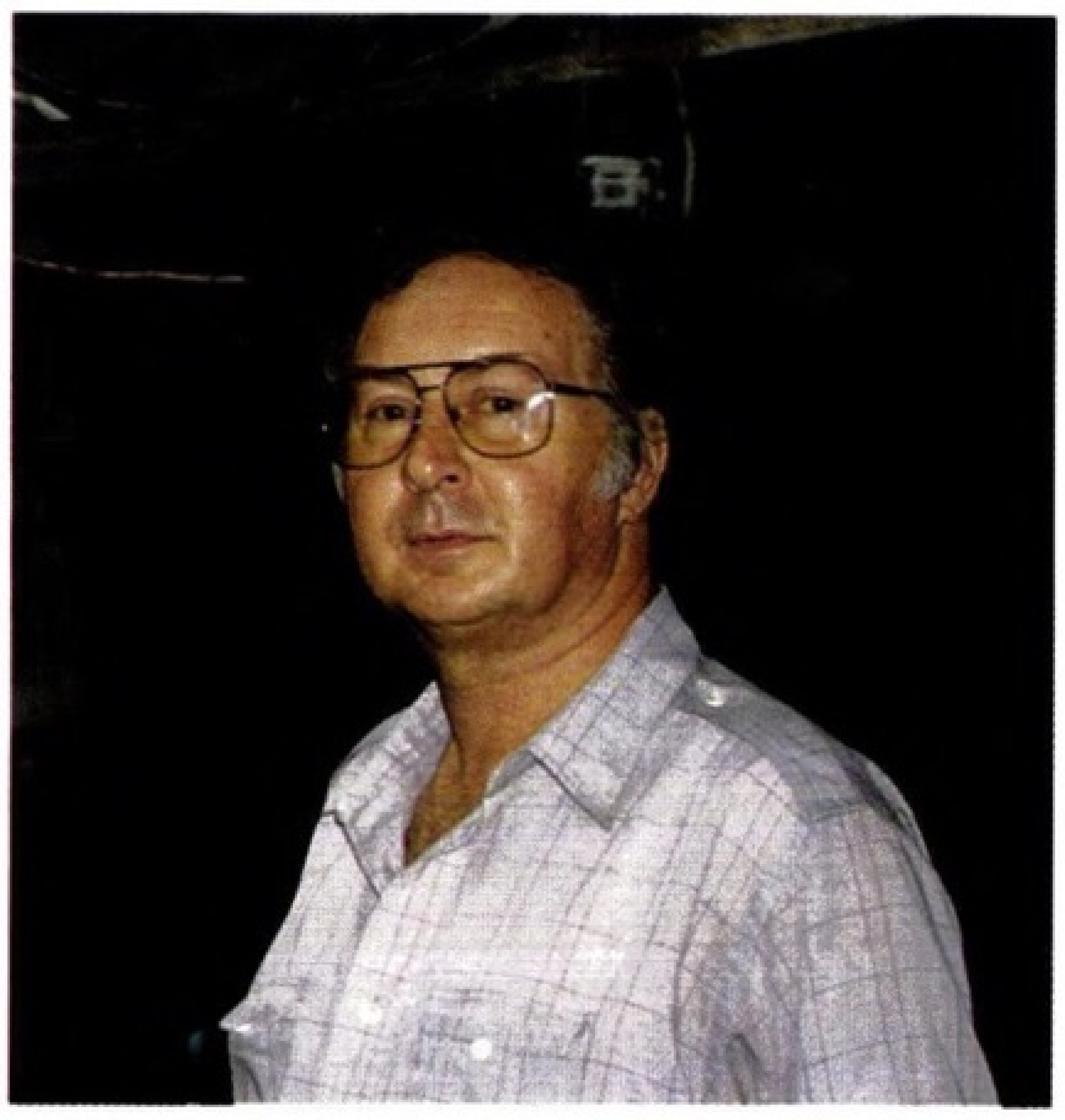


PHOTO FROM JOE MAIER

Father Joe – 1960s refugee 'still crazy after all these years'.

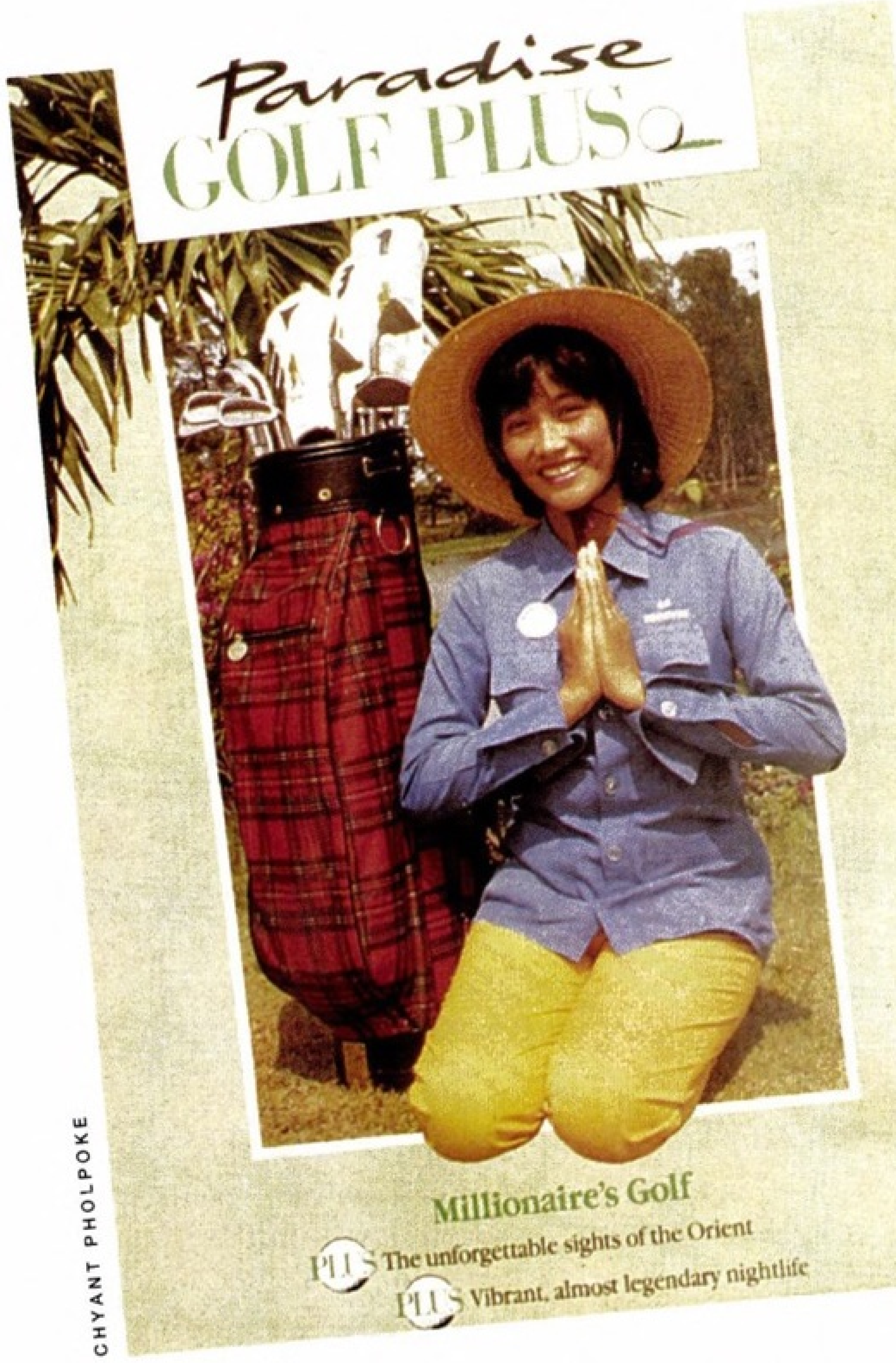
Next door a Cambodian refugee family of six is jammed into a single room. Father Joe has a big heart and a mouth like a longshoreman. He'll tell you the escalating price of 'visiting the pig' as a form of sexual release in Thai prisons – his indicator of inflation – or point out a woman in the Klong-toey streets who specializes in selling six-year-olds. Father Joe is mostly free of moral judgements about the residents of Klong-toey – 'people are people,' he shrugs. But he is a tireless fighter on their behalf. They need him. The Human Development Centre runs schools, adult education and an AIDS-education program to combat the HIV epidemic that has blossomed in the sexually free atmosphere of Thailand.

Housing is very poor in Klong-toey and the low-lying streets and narrow lanes that divide the wooden shacks are pools of stagnant water: 'Easily drained, if the city administration cared,' snorts Father Joe.

Thanks to Thailand's economic boom the land here is valuable – and vulnerable to real-estate speculators. Fires get started sometimes by accident, sometimes... who knows? There was a big one just before I visited and several hundred burnt-out residents have now set up camp under the neighbouring expressway – their only roof.

Father Joe is quick to get into an argument with his colleagues over how soon people should move back into the burnt-out area. They say that life amongst the charred rubble will be just too difficult. He is more concerned about the speculators getting their hands on this part of Klong-toey and people ending up with no place to go at all. ■

Richard Swift


Paradise
GOLF PLUS
Millionaire's Golf
PLUS The unforgettable sights of the Orient
PLUS Vibrant, almost legendary nightlife

CHYANT PHOLPOKE

Chasing the little white ball

*Golf courses are sprouting like mushrooms after spring rain across East and South-East Asia. **Malee Traisawasdichai** finds that fairways make good business but bad neighbours.*

'My wife was a caddie. She is dead.' So spoke 27-year-old Pong Kheungkham, father of a little boy and a poor farmer from Baan Thung Yang – a small village in Chiang Rai Province, Thailand. Janpeng, his wife, was two months pregnant when she miscarried on the 17th hole at the Santiburi Private Community. A month later she was dead.

Her caddie friends witnessed the incident. 'She might have thought she could manage to complete the 18-hole course distance,' said one. 'We caddies know how difficult it is to get our wage. Sometimes we have to wait for a week or two to get a round of work. So she might have tried to finish.'

Perhaps it was because she had carried the heavy bag over such a long course, or because of daily exposure to the chemical pesticides used to keep the greens – but the cause of Janpeng's death was never clearly established. Her story shows how rich golfers' élitist passion is satisfied at the expense of the poor. Golf constitutes an arrogant 'power sport' for the privileged few.

Around Asia the advent of the golf course means disruption of ecology and the human community. Japan, Asia's most golf-crazy country, has at least 2,016 golf courses covering 2,227.7 square kilometres of land. The area exceeds that of Tokyo.[1]

In Thailand – the centre of 'golf mania' in South-East Asia – 200 golf courses have depleted the country's limited water supply that is vital for rice farmers. In Malaysia over 160 golf courses have swallowed up tracts of rainforest. In Indonesia 91 golf courses have bitten a big chunk out of traditional farming wetlands and nature reserves, in one case expelling nearly 1,000 families.

China, Burma and Indochina are the new frontier of the corporate golf industry. A 'golf-resort-plus-casino' package is being introduced to Burma, Laos and Cambodia. In Laos, Thai developer Sompot Piyaoui's plans for the Kon Phapheng Resort Development include two casinos and two courses, a 1,200-room hotel, an international airport and a power station. The complex will be built in the middle of the Khon Phapheng Fall, an area known as 'the Niagara of Asia'. Thai journalist Ing K warns: 'Setting up a resort complex in the middle of the Khon Phapheng Fall, which is ecologically sensitive and the habitat of unique fauna like the Irrawaddy dolphins, is in itself unacceptable. It is a black and white issue. It's like you were going to poison the Mekong River right into Cambodia and Vietnam.'

Cheap land, weak regulations and feeble local opposition in South-East Asia – particularly Indochina – are a strong draw for Japanese developers. Back home in Japan strong local opposition has managed to halt the construction of 720 golf courses since 1988. For Asia's poorest countries golf resorts provide a lure to draw easy money from wealthy tourists, expatriates and the local *nouveaux riches*.

But golf is an expensive game for poor countries. Gen Morita of the Global Anti-Golf Movement (GAG'M) notes: 'Golf means using very large amounts of land. The average golf course uses about 100 hectares, whereas a football pitch is only one hectare. So for just one 18-hole golf course you could have 100 football pitches.'

How many 'golf dollars' stay in the host country is also a matter of debate. 'When a tourist starts his journey he buys a Nikon camera and then flies with Japan Airlines,' says Thai anti-golf activist Chyant Pholpoke. 'Arriving in, say, the Philippines for golfing, he takes a Toyota limousine and checks in at a Japanese-owned hotel. He goes up to his room in a Hitachi lift where he takes a drink from a Toshiba fridge, turns on a Sharp air conditioner and a National TV.'

The golfing craze and its jetset lifestyle raise crucial questions: how are limited natural resources to be used and for whom? One Vietnamese entrepreneur has his doubts about whether exclusive new clubs can attract enough members to be viable. 'Golf is a completely new thing in Vietnam,' he says. 'There's still no middle class... We won't see big numbers of

expatriates living here in the next five years.' The Japanese-owned Song Be Golf Resort in Ho Chi Minh City is expected to charge a fee of $30,000 for corporate memberships. The average Vietnamese would have to work 100 years to join.[2]

Golf is the sport of the powerful and influential. In Indonesia half the existing golf courses are owned by President Suharto and his family[3]. Bruce Bennett exposed this closely-knit world in his award-winning documentary *The Green Menace: The Untold Story of Golf*. The film notes that golf is the preferred sport of the Thai officer corps. 'The Thai military takes after the American model. The US armed forces have 300 golf courses, maintained at a cost of $60 million a year to the American taxpayers.' According to Thai Lieutenant General Sanan Kajornglam: 'Most generals have to play golf because it's a high-society game. Golf is expensive. If you are known to be good at golf and you play with the right clans, then let your superiors win, you can curry favour and get promoted.'

A few years ago the Bangkok *Nation* published a photo showing golf superstar Jack Nicklaus hitching a ride on a Thai Air Force helicopter to survey the site of the Nicklaus-designed Golden Valley project. This misuse of public funds started a scandal which escalated when course-construction crews blew up a state-owned mountain and encroached upon the KhaoYai National Park.

The *Green Menace* film caught Jack Nicklaus in a particularly expansive mood in Thailand: 'You've got great land. You've got plenty of water, with the amount of rain that you have. Certainly, you don't have problems from our standpoint.'

Thai farmers are not so sure. In 1994 Thailand experienced its worst-ever drought year. The Royal Irrigation Department (RID) discovered 13 golf courses illegally diverting water from irrigation canals. The Government, however, prohibited farmers from growing a second rice crop while golf courses went on pumping water from the reservoirs.

It's a delicious irony that Army Chief General Wimol Wongwanich held the 'Thai Golf Day' in April to raise funds for drought-ridden farmers. An independent survey conducted by Bangkok's Mahidol University confirmed that an average course consumes 6,500 cubic metres of water per day – enough to satisfy the domestic needs of 60,000 rural villagers.

Not bad, eh honey? Women caddies are part of the package for Asia's new jetset golfers.

DIDIER REUF / NETWORK

Suradej Vongsinlang – a water-resource engineer who quit his golf-course job – is candid about water-theft tactics: 'Some golf courses near rivers dump rocks and sand into the river to make the water level rise, so it will flow into their golf course.'

Caddies and course workers also fall victim to pesticide poisoning. Caddies interviewed at Santiburi golf course in Chiang Rai said they all suffered skin disease, dizziness and kidney problems after just a year's work. Dead birds are found almost every morning after greenkeepers have sprayed pesticide at night. In the US a Golf Course Superintendent Association's study confirmed that: 'Among golf-course superintendents there is more lung cancer, more brain cancer, more cancers of the large intestine and prostate. Especially lung cancer.'

The image of Thai women is often used to sell the country to tourists – golf tourism is no different. One promotion leaflet entitled 'Thailand Paradise Golf Plus' pulls few punches: 'The splendour of the courses and club houses is unrivalled in Europe. And the service offered by the caddies, who are young, friendly, knowledgeable – and usually female – is unparalleled in the world.' A receptionist at the Santiburi golf course revealed: 'I have been approached by golfers many times to go out. Once a Malaysian pro told me if I went with him he would give me all the money he won from the game. But I managed to refuse his offer gently.'

Amid uncontrolled proliferation of golf courses worldwide, GAG'M has been formed by networks from 16 countries to deflate the pro-golf rhetoric. They declared 1994 'No Golf Year', calling for a worldwide moratorium on golf-course construction, a ban on introducing golf as an Olympic sport and a halt to the heavy promotion of golf-related tourism. GAG'M's spokesperson Gen Morita draws lessons from his native Japan: 'Our job is to let people – particularly those in the Third World – know about the destruction golf courses cause… In Japan we have experienced all these mistakes… and suffered and lost so much; the river, the wetlands, the forest and the whole social atmosphere.'

It remains to be seen whether the 'nature-loving' golfer can be convinced. ■

Malee Traisawasdichai is a journalist with the *Nation* in Bangkok.

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1 *GAG'M Newsletter*, May 1994. **2** *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 14 October 1993. **3** *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 5 May 1994. Special thanks to Anita Pleumarom, who provided useful information for this story.

THE MIRACLE AND THE MIRAGE : THE ASIAN SUCCESS STORY

The growth figures for East and South-East Asia have been raising eyebrows across the financial world – and furrowing the brows of those who have to live with the less-publicized consequences.

The initial success of the four 'little tigers' (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore) in the 1970s and 1980s is now spreading to their neighbours – Thailand, Malaysia and parts of Indonesia and China. Here **NI** takes stock of what has been gained – and at what cost.

Thailand

Rate of economic growth 1994: 8.3%

THE MIRACLE

ECONOMY

Per capita GNP[2] 1973	Per capita GNP[2] 1994	Average yearly growth of exports[3] 1970-80	Average yearly growth of exports[3] 1980-92
$240	$2,085	10.3%	14.7%

STANDARDS

Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)[2] 1970-75	Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)[2] 1991	Women in secondary education %[3] 1970	Women in secondary education %[3] 1991
55	27	15	32

THE DOWNSIDE

- Thailand has had an annual rate of deforestation of 2.6% between 1965 and 1989 – one of the highest in Asia.[5]
- The absolute number of poor people has increased over the period of high growth rates.
- In 1992 the Thai military government under General Suchinda massacred 52 democracy demonstrators and arrested 3,000 others.
- Even after the re-establishment of civilian government the whereabouts of 21 people who disappeared during the crackdown has not been established. Extra-judicial disappearances and killings are not uncommon in Thailand.
- The fate of union leader Thonong Po-arn at the hands of the military remains unknown.[6]

Malaysia

Rate of economic growth 1994: 8.4%

THE MIRACLE

ECONOMY

Per capita GNP[2] 1973	Per capita GNP[2] 1994	Average yearly growth of exports[3] 1970-80	Average yearly growth of exports[3] 1980-92
$550	$3,230	4.8%	11.3%

STANDARDS

Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)[2] 1970-75	Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)[2] 1991	Women in secondary education %[3] 1970	Women in secondary education %[3] 1991
37	16	28	59

THE DOWNSIDE

- In 1992-93, 80 political activists were detained without charge under the Internal Security Act – 126 were held altogether.
- The death penalty remains in force for a variety of crimes.
- In 1993, 28 people were sentenced to death.
- The Internal Security Law has been amended 18 times – each time to give it more bite.
- Only 12% of manufacturing workers have been able to unionize.[8]

Singapore

Rate of economic growth 1994: 8.8%

THE MIRACLE

ECONOMY

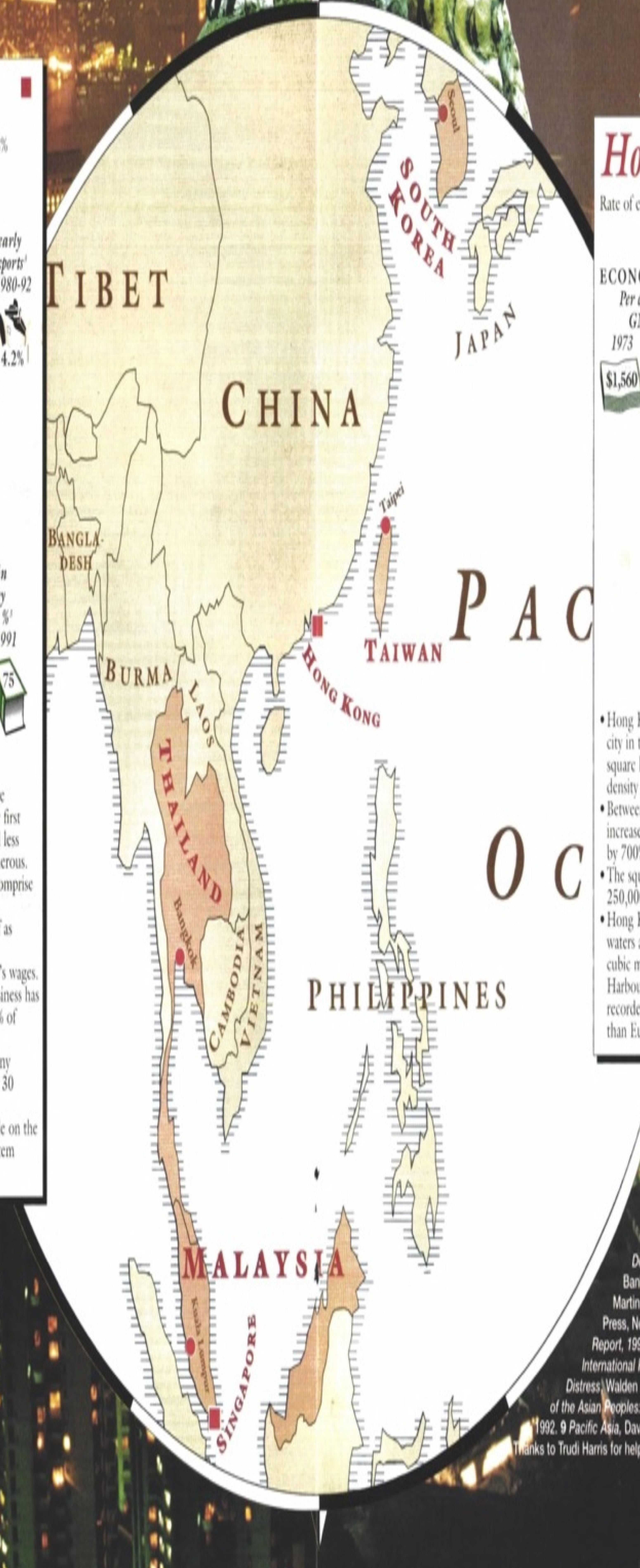
Per capita GNP[2] 1973	Per capita GNP[2] 1994	Average yearly growth of exports[3] 1970-80	Average yearly growth of exports[3] 1980-92
$1,580	$18,025	9.9%	4.2%

STANDARDS

Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)[2] 1970-75	Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)[2] 1991	Women in secondary education %[3] 1970	Women in secondary education %[3] 1991
14	7	45	75

THE DOWNSIDE

- For well-educated parents there are subsidies of up to $5,000 for their first three children. For the poorer and less educated, subsidies are far less generous.
- Undocumented foreign workers comprise 16% of all prison inmates.
- Some 28% of GDP is siphoned off as transnational profits.
- Women make around 75% of men's wages.
- Unlike other Asian NICs local business has a small role, contributing only 30% of gross manufacturing output.[7]
- Capital punishment applies for many offences. Caning is mandatory for 30 offences.
- Riding with a damaged ticket while on the Singapore Mass Rapid Transit System incurs a fine.



Hong Kong

Rate of economic growth 1994: 4.9%

THE MIRACLE

ECONOMY

Per capita GNP[2] 1973	Per capita GNP[2] 1994	Average yearly growth of exports[3] 1970-80	Average yearly growth of exports[3] 1980-92
$1,560	$18,500	9.7%	5.0%

STANDARDS

Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)[2] 1970-75	Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)[2] 1991
15	7

THE DOWNSIDE

- Hong Kong is the most densely populated city in the world – 105,000 people per square kilometre (1987), 2.5 times the density of Lagos, which is next on the list.
- Between 1961 and 1981 population increased by 53% and the number of cars by 700%.
- The squatter population is in excess of 250,000.
- Hong Kong harbour and surrounding waters are badly polluted. Over 1.6 million cubic meters of waste flow into Victoria Harbour every day. Repulse Bay has recorded water quality 52 times worse than European safety standards.[9]

South Korea

Rate of economic growth 1994: 6.3%[1]

THE MIRACLE

ECONOMY

Per capita GNP[2] 1973	Per capita GNP[2] 1994	Average yearly growth of exports[3] 1970-80	Average yearly growth of exports[3] 1980-92
$460	$7,250	23.5%	11.9%

STANDARDS

Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)[2] 1970-75	Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)[2] 1991	Women in secondary education %[3] 1970	Women in secondary education %[3] 1991
40	17	32	88

THE DOWNSIDE

- Korea has one of the worst records for industrial disputes over wages and arduous, dangerous working conditions. In 1987 there were 3,742 strikes. In 1992 the number dropped to 235.
- An average of five workers are killed on the job every day and 390 more injured – one of the highest occupational-accident rates in the world.
- Women workers earn less than 60% of male wages.
- In 1991 Korea had the highest number of labour representatives in prison of any country in the world.[4]

Taiwan

Rate of economic growth 1994: 6.2%

THE MIRACLE

ECONOMY

Per capita GNP[2] 1973	Per capita GNP[2] 1994	Average yearly growth of exports[3] 1970-80	Average yearly growth of exports[3] 1980-92
n/a	$11,236	15.6%	11.0%

THE DOWNSIDE

- Environmental decay: Some 20% of farmland is polluted by industrial waste water; 30% of the rice grown by heavy metals. More than 50% of river water is badly polluted.
- There are three factories per square kilometre.
- Air quality standards in Taipei are unsafe 17% of the time even by lenient official standards. Cancer rates have doubled over the last 30 years and asthma cases among children have increased four-fold over the last 10.
- Labour disputes grew from 15 in 1965 to 485 in 1975 to 1,622 in 1985. Between 1985 and 1987, 4,540 labour disputes went to arbitration before district courts.[7]

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1 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 1994. 2 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 1974 & October 1994. 3 *World Development Report 1993*, World Bank. 4 *The Rush to Development*, Martin Hart-Landsberg, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1993. 5 *World Development Report*, 1992, World Bank. 6 *Amnesty International Report*, London, 1993. 7 *Dragons in Distress*, Walden Bello, Penguin Books, 1992. 8 *State of the Asian Peoples: A Report*, ARENA, Hong Kong, 1992. 9 *Pacific Asia*, David Drakakis-Smith, Routledge, 1992.

Thanks to Trudi Harris for help with research.

TIGER PHOTO: MIKE HUGHES

HONG KONG PHOTO: JOCK KURTZ / IMPACT

Strip-mining the future

Walden Bello unearths the seeds of a fresh grassroots agenda that is challenging East Asia's growth mania.

BACKGROUND PHOTOGRAPH: JAMES NACHTWEY / MAGNUM

'ALTHOUGH the Newly Industrializing Countries may be regarded as tigers because they are strong, ferocious traders, the analogy has a darker side. Tigers live in the jungle and by the law of the jungle. They are a shrinking population.'

This ominous statement by a senior US Treasury official aptly captures the mood of the trade war between the United States and the fast-growing economies of the East Asia-Pacific region. Trade, however, is but one front of a larger war. The official view in the US is that their massive trade deficit with Japan and the Asian Newly Industrializing Countries (NICs) is not a result of fair market competition but of massive subsidies, industrial targeting and protectionism – all orchestrated by the state. There is a fundamental clash between two different strategies of development: free-market capitalism and state-assisted or NIC capitalism.

Political leaders, economists and technocrats in Latin America and other parts of the Third World are following this struggle with keen interest. Many an envious gaze is being cast at the Asian success story.

It is, however, ironic that free-market economics has achieved unparalleled hegemony in development discourse. For the most striking NIC achievements on the ground have consistently violated free-market principles. In the now-famous phrase of economist Alice Amsden, their high-speed growth has been achieved 'not because they got the prices right but because they got them deliberately wrong'.

In the face of the US trade and doctrinal assault, Asian political and economic élites have remained steadfast. They have not merely refused to 'roll back' their interventionist policies but are seeking to legitimize a positive role for an activist and protectionist state. Japan's formidable Ministry of Trade and Industry, for instance, criticized the doctrinal approach institutionalized in World Bank/IMF reforms as being responsible for the almost universal stagnation of Third World economies under structural adjustment.

Élites on both sides of the Pacific continue to battle over whether the direction of Asia-Pacific development should be along free-market or state-assisted capitalist lines. But over the last few years non-governmental organizations (NGOs), people's movements and progressive academics across Asia have evolved a powerful critique of élite models – and the beginnings of an alternative.

Sustainable development is no simple-minded import from the North. It is the product of a myriad of grassroots confrontations with the alienating and repressive results of both kinds of development 'from above'. While it is shaded with the red of independent Marxism and the green of Western environmentalism it is much more than that – primarily an indigenous effort to address the contradictions of four decades of Western-style development. As sustainable development steps into the vacuum created by the collapse of traditional socialism, it is becoming a vehicle for the aspirations of those who have been dealt out of Asia's economic miracle.

The sustainable development critique sees clearly enough the differences between the free market and NIC approaches, but prefers to concentrate on their similarities. Both models:

- fetishize economic growth as the be-all and the end-all of development.
- generate and perpetuate social inequality even as rapid growth occurs. High growth allows *absolute* income to rise despite the worsening of income distribution, as in the Korean, Taiwanese, Singaporean and Thai economies over the last decade.
- are ecologically destructive to the point of unsustainability. They tend to run down 'natural capital' (clean air, soil fertility, usable water), as ecological costs are seldom included as real costs of production.
- uproot and destroy communities, particularly of indigenous peoples. The stories, particularly in south east Asia, are depressingly similar: big-dam schemes imposed from the center; displaced people; the silent erosion of community identity through resettlement.
- are agendas of the élite, though in the case of the NICs the state élite has managed to discipline the short-term profit seeking of the private sector and made it follow a strategic 'national development' path.

Alternatives: the theory

East Asian NGOs are often criticized for being long on critique but short on prescription. This is changing. Despite differences of national emphasis an alternative development strategy is emerging in Thailand, the Philippines, Korea and Taiwan with the same basic core of key ideas:

- The 'invisible hand' of the free market and the hierarchical, centralizing thrust of the NICs would be replaced by decision-making devolved to communities and regions.
- Sustainable development de-emphasizes growth in favor of equity, the quality of life and ecological harmony.
- Agriculture and the reinvigoration of rural society become the centrepiece of the development process.
- The dependence on capital-intensive high technology in industry and

Harvesting the Aouyo leaves these days is left to the old – the neglected countryside has to be the centrepiece of sustainable development in East Asia

KOREAN FARMERS ALLIANCE

영 원
우리 단결투쟁
서독안경
금강사
도매
서울의료기총판

KOREAN FARMERS ALLIANCE

Expecting the worst – Korea's farmers must brave the tear gas to defend their communities against GATT-inspired modernization.

chemical-intensive agriculture would be reversed in favor of more appropriate labor-intensive techniques for industry (to take advantage of people, the Third World's greatest resource) and organic, chemical-free agro-technology.

- The popular sector organized through the NGOs would become a third pillar of the political and economic system with the state and business.
- Sustainable development would expand the 'commons' – community or ancestral property that cannot be disposed of either by the market or by the state.

Emigration rates are one indication of the need for sustainable alternatives. They reveal deep-seated apprehensions. The numbers of people leaving Taiwan, Singapore and even Korea for the West have not declined with the spectacular growth rates.

Perhaps this reflects a sense that NIC development is really a strip-mine process that destroys the future for the sake of the present. Hsu Shen-Shu, founder of Taiwan's eco-feminist New Housewives' Association, points an accusing finger at her own country's economic and political élites: 'After benefiting from the exploitation of the island, they send their children to the US because it's too polluted here in Taiwan.'

Alternatives: the practice

Sustainable development is not just some fancy new theory. Indigenous and peasant communities have long sustained a way of life in harmony with their natural surroundings. The Karen, who live in the mid-altitudes of Thailand's northern highlands, have practiced a sustainable agriculture for generations. Karen agro-technology is based on rotational farming. Leaving some cultivated fields unplanted for a few years allows the soil to regain its nutrients; diversified multicrop planting also enhances soil fertility. There is no need for chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

Such practices have, in many cases, been abandoned under the pressure of uncontrolled market forces and state-imposed development projects. Profit-driven technologies have impoverished peasant and indigenous communities. Displaced farmers are eventually pushed into the hoards of migrant workers that crowd into Bangkok every year.

Nonetheless, with the deepening crisis of orthodox development strategies, alternatives aimed at reviving traditional practices of sustainable development are now under way all over the Asia-Pacific. Two notable success stories are worthy of mention.

Mangrove forests are a vital component of complex coastal ecosystems in the tropics. Yet they have been ravaged with breathtaking speed by logging concessions, destructive fishing practices and especially by prawn or shrimp farming.

In Thailand between 1969 and 1989 the mangrove forest area declined by 50 per cent. But villagers in Si Kao and Kan Tang districts in the southern province of Trang have successfully created a 250-hectare community mangrove forest. Destructive fishing methods have been effectively banned. Since the fishing was stopped, marine life and other indicators of coastal ecology have improved dramatically.

The island of Cebu in the central Philippines exhibits many of the disheartening problems plaguing the Philippine agrarian economy as a whole: erosion due to massive deforestation, deteriorating living conditions of peasant smallholders and an almost total absence of government programs to support peasant productivity. Agricultural land is being converted into commercial real estate. The result: massive migration of the displaced peasants to the cities.

But, like the Thai villagers in Trang, some Filipino farmers in Cebu have put into motion strategies of community-based development to save their livelihoods and their surroundings. BAPAKA, an exciting 14-year-old experiment in farmer self-reliance, has enjoyed some success in countering displacement and dispossession on the island of Cebu. Now covering 27 villages in four districts and encompassing some 2,880 members, BAPAKA has evolved a multi-pronged assault on peasant poverty. This consists of a food-security program resting on small production teams that maximize yields from individual farms. A loan-and-savings fund is providing for members' emergency and production needs. Local livestock and poultry processing has been set up. There is even a research-and-development program to propagate indigenous and organic farming methods.

So far this handful of fragile success stories is confined to the local-community level, an enclave under constant assault from both market and state. To make sustainable development an alternative at the national level an alliance of NGOs in the Philippines has successfully pressed the government of Fidel Ramos to create the Philippine Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD). While the thrust of the Government's economic policy is to make the Philippines 'a NIC by the year 2000', the PCSD allows NGOs to question this vision and propose credible alternatives.

If sustainable development is to be credible in an increasingly integrated region it must address regional issues. The Americans have the Asia Pacific Economic Council (APEC) and Asian leaders are gravitating towards Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir's idea of an 'East Asia Economic Group'. This would leave state-assisted capitalist structures in place while excluding from membership the US, Australia and Canada.

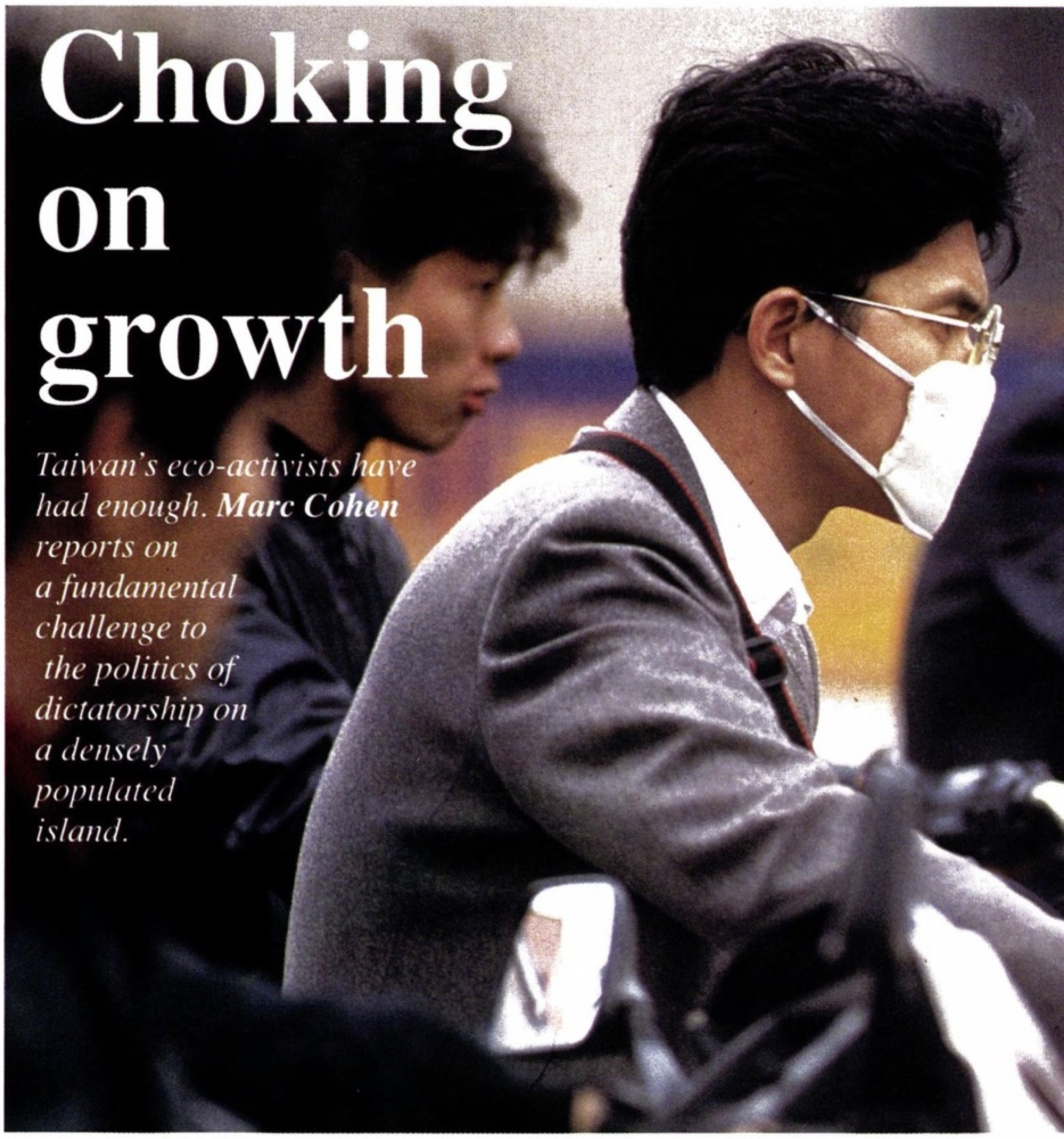
But already NGOs are taking the first steps towards a viable regional model. Two Bangkok conferences, the People's Forum (1991) and the People's Plan 21 (1992), brought people's organizations from all over Asia together to begin articulating a different vision of an Asia-Pacific future.

That vision is, more than ever, a necessity. For while the rampant consumerism that comes with high-speed growth continues to dazzle many, there is also a spreading feeling that super-industrial growth accompanied by the decline of agriculture, greater inequality and uncontrolled ecological degradation is a recipe for an unlivable future. ■

Walden Bello is co-author of *Dragons in Distress: Asia's Miracle Economies in Crisis* (Penguin Books, London, 1991). He is presently engaged in setting up the Center for the South in Bangkok.

Choking on growth

Taiwan's eco-activists have had enough. ***Marc Cohen*** *reports on a fundamental challenge to the politics of dictatorship on a densely populated island.*



Burning rubber away from rural society – but environmental detours lie ahead.

HEINE PEDERSEN / STILL PICTURES

THE surgical mask worn for protection against unhealthy air has replaced the conical farmer's hat as the most representative Taiwanese garb. In less than 50 years Taiwan has leapfrogged from a peasant society to the cutting edge of high technology. In the process what was once called *Ilha Formosa*, the 'beautiful island', has become a cesspool sunk in the Pacific.

Now many Taiwanese are fed up. Increasingly, people in Taiwan are insisting that their quality of life – and that of future generations – should receive priority, even if this knocks a couple of points off the economic growth rate.

In May 1994 Taiwan's leading environmental organization, the Taiwan Environmental Protection Union (TEPU), turned out 20,000 demonstrators in Taipei to protest against government plans for a fourth nuclear-power plant. That same week the mayor of Kungliao – the proposed plant site – staged a referendum on the facility: 96 per cent of the voters said 'no'.

Just 15 years earlier those instigating similar challenges to official policy had been arrested, tortured and imprisoned under martial law after a show trial. But grassroots environmental actions have played a big part in opening up Taiwan's political life. Today, though the ruling Kuomintang (KMT, or Nationalist Party) retains a firm grip on power, it faces vocal opposition in parliament and a vibrant civil society full of dissenting views.

Despite environmental ruin and years of repressive dictatorship, Taiwan is the darling of the international development establishment. The island has indeed undergone a spectacular economic transformation. In 1945, when the KMT first took over, 75 per cent of economically active Taiwanese tilled the soil. Between 1952 and 1987 annual economic growth averaged a whopping nine per cent. Income per person climbed from $145 in 1951 to $9,805 in 1993 – more than in Greece or Portugal.

The fruits of this growth have been widely shared among the Taiwanese people. In 1992 unemployment stood at just 1.5 per cent. Life expectancy, at 74 years, is similar to that of Northern countries. Nutritional levels are among the best in Asia. Widespread educational opportunities have allowed barefoot sons and daughters of poor peasants to become engineers, scientists, doctors, lawyers and business executives. In contrast to Japan and Korea, where hulking conglomerates predominate, enterprises with 30 workers or fewer account for 80 per cent of industrial jobs.

Yet there has been a dreadful environmental price to pay for all this. In 1987 the environmental activist and opposition politician Weng Ching-chu wrote a poem entitled 'We Have Made You Dirty'. It vividly tallies the ecological costs of 'success': smog; 'cars running wild'; dead rivers full of household garbage, industrial waste and farm pesticides; unsafe food; 'heavy minerals accumulated in our bodies'; deteriorating public health. 'We blindly introduced industry/Then buried ourselves in the graves of pretty clothes and nice foods,' she lamented.

Among the negative entries in Taiwan's environmental ledger are the following:

- Only one per cent of human waste receives primary treatment.
- Water in the streams near the petrochemical complex in Hou Chin in southern Taiwan is combustible.
- Taiwan's farmers are among the world's heaviest users of agricultural chemicals – consumers look for fruit with telltale insect bites to indicate that it is pesticide-free.
- Taiwan has 15 times as many motor vehicles per square kilometer as the US.
- Cancer is the leading cause of death – the rate doubled between 1960 and 1990.

Lee Kieng-hong, an environmental engineer on the TEPU staff, complains that 'Taiwanese kids have no consciousness about the environment. They don't care because our society teaches us only to make money.'

During the repressive early 1980s fledgling environmental efforts favoured moderate tactics. There were a few isolated demonstrations against factory pollution, but it was mostly an élite affair, involving scholars, journalists and government officials. The moderate tone helped to gain wide media attention and achieved some successes. But within a few years voices began to rise from the grassroots. This time they came from farmers, workers, small business people and political activists who challenged the KMT police state and its allies.

CHRIS STOWERS / PANOS

In March 1986 a community-based environmental group in the old west-central port town of Lukang launched a struggle which was to have far-reaching effects. The Government had approved plans by the US transnational Dupont to build a $160 million plant making dye from titanium dioxide. It was the single largest investment project in Taiwan's history – with no community consultation or environmental impact study. The community worried about hazardous wastes undermining the seafood and tourism industries – the town has a number of popular historical sites – which employed more people and generated more revenue than Dupont ever would. And, as Lukang environmentalists told me at the time, they were quite conscious of recent environmental disasters in Bhopal and Chernobyl. Led by Li Tong-liang, a KMT member of the local county council, they were determined to block the opening of the plant. They staged protests, held public meetings and delivered petitions to Dupont's Taipei office, all the while facing down secret police and military harassment.

Finally, the Government and Dupont agreed to move the venture elsewhere and to conduct environmental and community opinion assessments. The resolve of Lukang's environmentalists – and their surprising victory over powerful foes – sparked action in other communities. In the late 1980s an average of one environmental protest occurred each day.

Lukang inspired other Taiwanese social and political movements as well. Defying KMT repression, democracy advocates, students, farmers, workers, feminists, indigenous people and impoverished veterans took to the streets. Oppositionists ignored martial-law restrictions and formed the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in September 1986 to challenge the KMT's lock on power.

When TEPU was established in November 1987 grass-roots environmental action groups and the élite conservationists came together. Its founding declaration urged the KMT to reverse course: 'When economic growth and environmental protection are in conflict, conservation of the environment should be the first priority.' TEPU now has 10 semi-autonomous local branches around the island and a monthly magazine, *Taiwan Environment.*

Taiwan's environmental movement has devoted much attention to the petrochemical industry, which accounts for about 25 per cent of the island nation's GNP. Farmers and fisherfolk living near plants charge that hazardous wastes are destroying their livelihoods. Hou Chin residents began three years of sit-ins at the state-owned China Petroleum Company (CPC) complex in mid-1987 to protest plans for a new 'naphtha cracker' (plastics raw material plant). In 1990 the Government agreed to spend $55 million on additional pollution controls and community health benefits, and appointed a panel to monitor environmental practices.

Aware that environmental consciousness is crystallizing, the Government has offered both sticks and carrots. It has cracked down on militant protesters. In May 1992 police violently broke up a sit-in at a CPC refinery that is one of the island's worst polluters. Protest leaders received jail terms of six months to four-and-a-half years for 'interfering with police duties'. General Hau Pei-tsun, the prime minister in the early 1990s, threatened to arrest environmentalists as 'hooligans'.

But the Government has also moved to beef up pollution control. In 1987 the Environmental Protection Agency became a cabinet ministry. The EPA has helped mediate disputes between factories and communities. But it is generally regarded as timid in forcing compliance with environmental laws.

Nuclear power is currently Taiwan's main environmental issue. The Government chose nuclear energy as the solution to the 1973 oil crisis. Taiwan now relies on nuclear energy for 38 per cent of its electricity, the highest in the world after France.

However, highly publicized safety problems, including serious accidents at existing plants, have led to widespread public opposition to further expansion. The risks of nuclear power on a small, densely populated island are obvious. Two of the three on-line plants are located within 12 miles of metropolitan Taipei – home to six million people – in an area prone to earthquakes and typhoons, and on the edge of a semi-active volcano.

Taiwan's authorities have looked for easy answers to the problem of radioactive waste. Currently they ship it to Orchid Island, off Taiwan's south-east tip, which is home to 3,000 Yami aborigines. In 1991, 400 Yamis – many in traditional costumes – staged a colorful demonstration against what they called the Government's 'environmental racism'.

But in February 1991, Prime Minister Hau rescinded cancellation of the fourth nuclear plant at Kungliao, citing the Persian Gulf conflict and concerns for 'the living standards of some 20 million people...'. The May 1994 protest that followed was the largest environmental demonstration in Taiwan's history.

Ultimately, the enactment of sustainable industrial and energy policies in Taiwan will require a more open political system. Since the Lukang victory the island has moved in that direction. For one thing, martial law has been overturned. But since it remains impossible to vote the KMT out of power, public protest is still the only way for popular movements to influence policy. ■

Marc Cohen writes frequently about development issues in Asia and the Pacific, and is based in Washington DC.

Simply... Alchemy o

SPECTACULAR RATES OF ECONOMIC GROWTH ARE SPREADING FROM THE FOUR TIGERS OF ASIA (SINGAPORE, TAIWAN, SOUTH KOREA AND HONG KONG) TO THEIR ASIAN NEIGHBOURS, PARTICULARLY THAILAND AND MALAYSIA. The chemistry of this economic success is a hotly debated topic. Some, like the IMF and World Bank, put it down to the magic of the market. Others point to a heavy government hand behind the emphasis on growth through exports. NI looks at the East Asian economic sorcery and finds the reasons for success are not easily separated from the costs of high-speed industrialization.

RIGGING THE TRADE GAME

'Export at all costs!' is the first commandment of Asia's new miracle economies. Exports like Hyundai cars and Taiwanese electronics are subsidized from the public purse and often sold at low profit margins in order to gain 'market share' and the allegiance of foreign consumers. Undervalued currencies are another way in which Taiwan and the other 'tiger' economies have made sure their exports were cheap and imports too expensive for local consumers. Domestic economies are heavily protected. In South Korea, for instance, almost no-one drives a car that is not made in Korea. And the code for foreign investors is one of the strictest in the world.

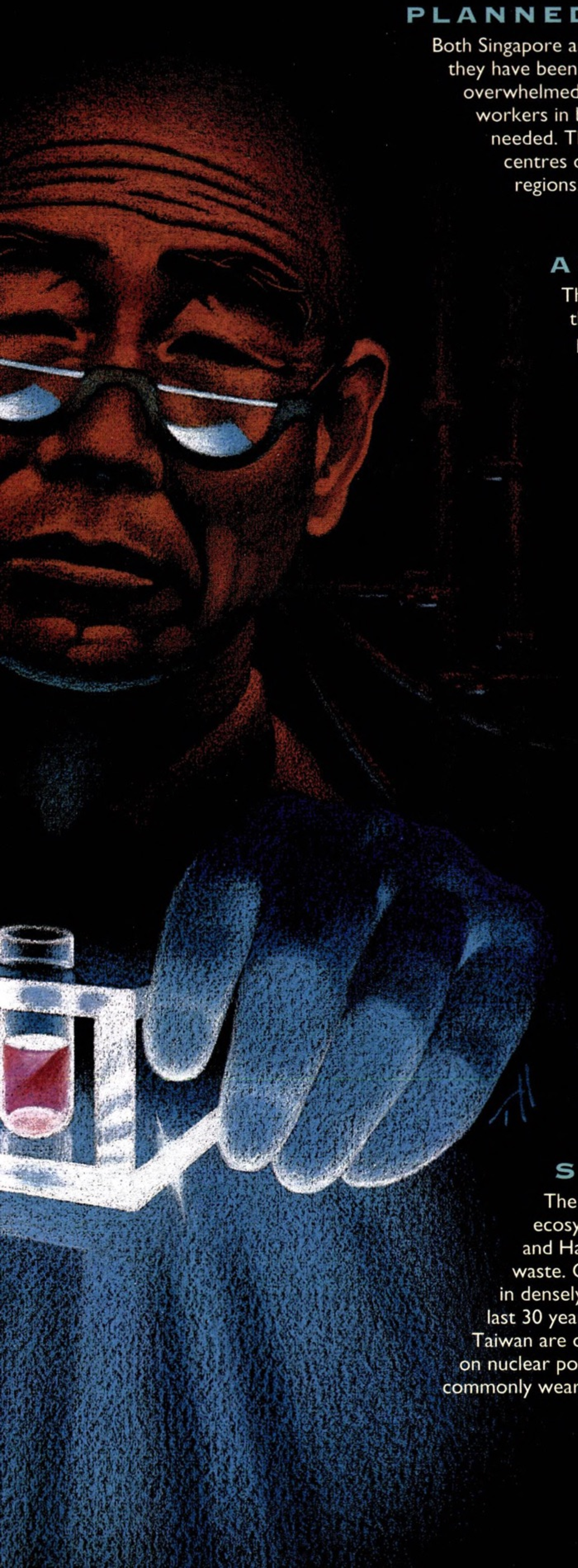
COMMAND ECONOMY

Despite eulogies to the market by its partisans the Asian economic 'miracle' is the product of a highly interventionist state. The use of subsidies to underwrite otherwise uneconomic exports, the control of finance and foreign exchange, centralized economic planning and a large public sector (particularly in Taiwan) are typical of the 'tiger' economies. In its heyday the powerful Economic Planning Board in Seoul could make or break the large 'Chaebol' enterprises that dominate the Korean economy. Rather than reflections of pure market logic 'tiger' economics has achieved success by 'getting the prices wrong' – through the manipulation of credit and the supply of foreign exchange to achieve export growth.

LAND REFORM

Both Taiwan and South Korea underwent far-reaching land reforms in the 1950s. In South Korea it was to counter the appeal of the Communists; in Taiwan to break the power of the indigenous landed élite so that the mainland nationalist Chinese could take over. Land reform in both places boosted support for the government among small farmers. And, given the precarious economics of small-plot agriculture, a growing pool of cheap labour left the countryside for the cities and export-processing zones. The landlord class that stood as a block to industrial development in Latin America was eliminated early in East Asia.

f a miracle



PLANNED CITIES

Both Singapore and Hong Kong have had several key advantages. As city-states they have been able to control the migration of poor rural dwellers that has overwhelmed almost all other Third World cities. They have taken in workers in boom times and expelled them when they were no longer needed. Their location has also made these two bustling ports into centres of financial and communication services for their surrounding regions.

AUTOCRATIC GOVERNMENT

Three of the Four Tiger societies have not bothered much with the niceties of human rights - being particularly harsh on political opposition and workers organizing independent unions for better wages and working conditions. Singapore's jails are home to some of the world's longest-serving political prisoners. The Korean military massacred hundreds of protesters in the ancient city of Kwangju as recently as 1980. Only in Hong Kong has there been relative political tolerance, although no right to democratic government.

COLD WAR AID

In the early period of their industrial take-off both Taiwan and South Korea, the cornerstones of US anti-Communist strategy in Asia, were recipients of lavish economic and military aid. In the 1950s this aid was equivalent to 95 per cent of Taiwan's trade surplus. Between 1945 and 1978 South Korea got almost six billion dollars in US economic aid, almost as much as all of Africa. This aid helped build up the infrastructure of modern export economies.

HARD WORK

Workers in the East Asian miracle economies work some of the longest hours in the world. Many in South Korea still work 10 or 12 hours a day with one of the highest rates of industrial accidents in the world. In Hong Kong just one week's annual leave for industrial workers is common. With the exception of Hong Kong, organizing independent unions is difficult. In Taiwan and South Korea company unions have been the norm until very recently. In Singapore the very tight police surveillance on a small island makes democratic unionism an impossibility.

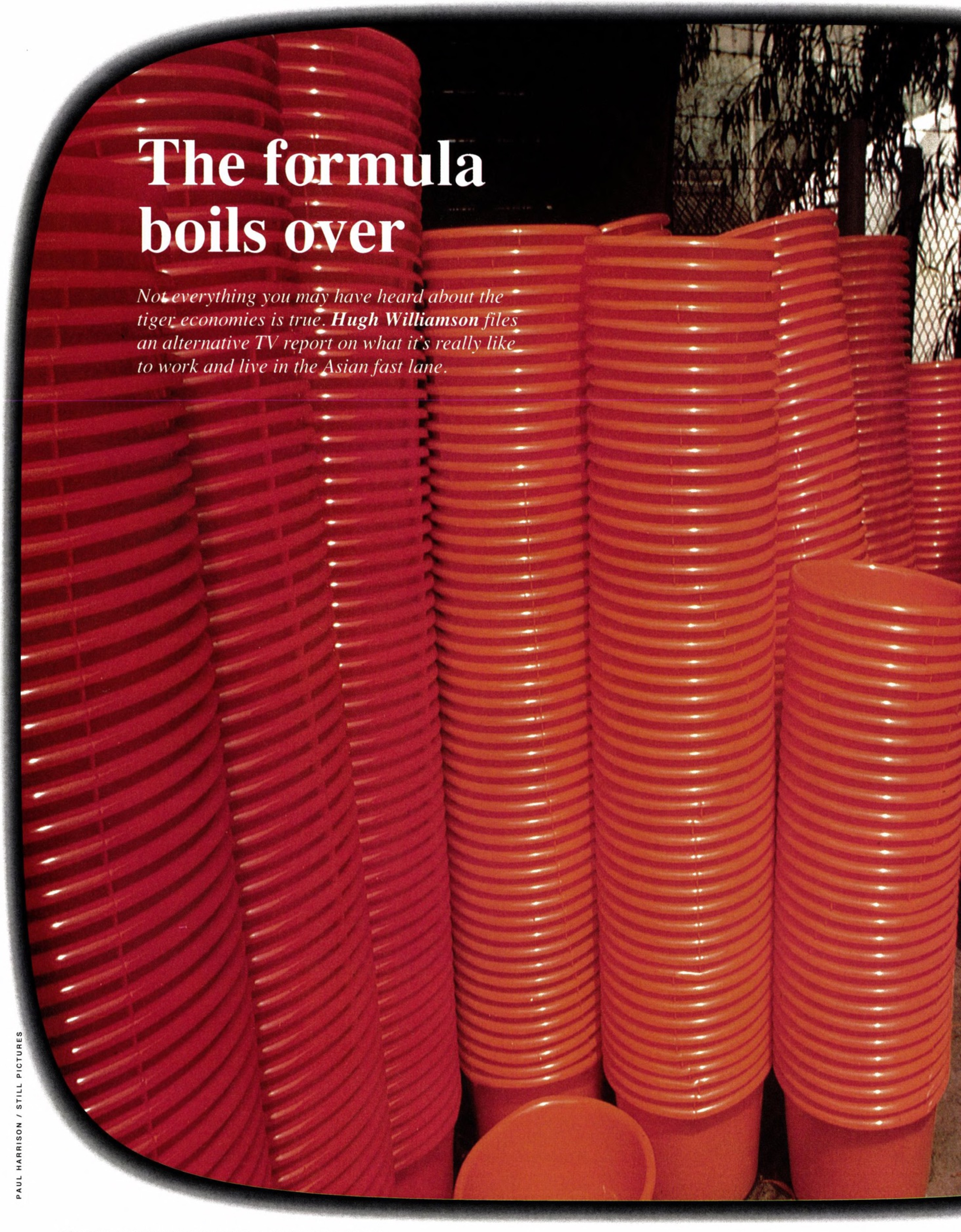
SPOILING NATURE

The environmental costs of boom times have been born by the ecosystems and citizens of Taiwan and South Korea. The Nakdong and Han rivers in Korea are both badly polluted with industrial waste. Chemical agriculture has poisoned land and water, particularly in densely populated Taiwan where cancer rates have doubled over the last 30 years. It is already the leading cause of death. Both Korea and Taiwan are committed to massive expansion of an already heavy reliance on nuclear power. Urban air quality is so bad in Taipei that motorcyclists commonly wear surgical masks.

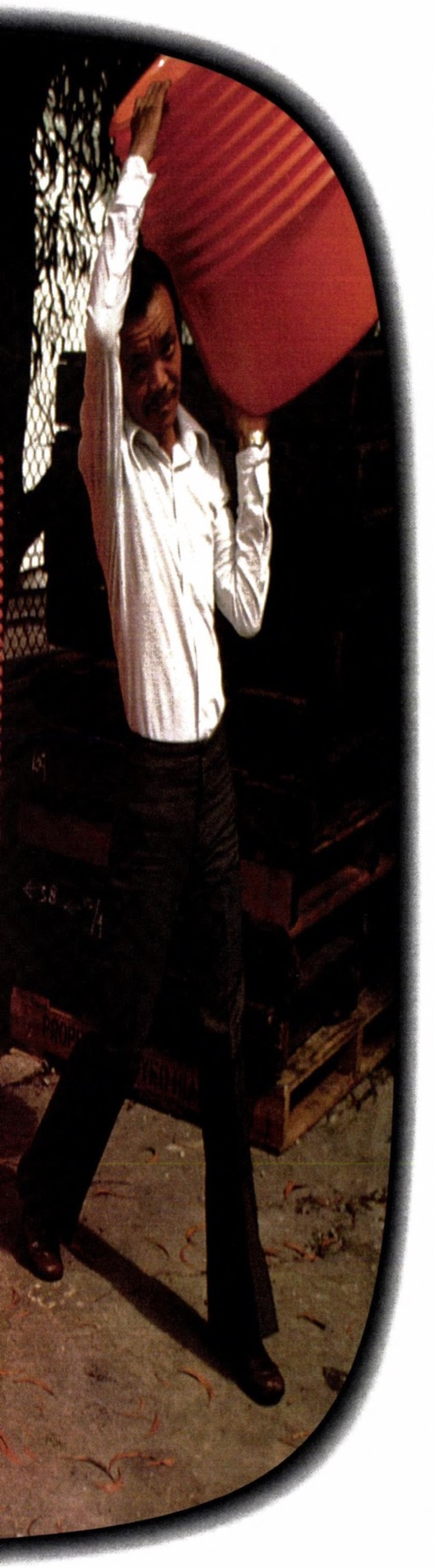
ILLUSTRATION BY TOM HUNT

The formula boils over

*Not everything you may have heard about the tiger economies is true. **Hugh Williamson** files an alternative TV report on what it's really like to work and live in the Asian fast lane.*



PAUL HARRISON / STILL PICTURES



IN the West standard images of industrial workers in Asia's miracle economies abound. TV news reports show young women sitting at work benches, their nimble fingers making light work of intricate tasks; new cars rolling off production lines and onto huge transporter ships bound for Western ports. Or, alternatively, depressing reports of factory closures back home: '2,000 jobs lost at local company! Business moves to South-East Asia, where costs are lower and labour relations easier.'

TV documentaries or news magazines fill in the 'background'. Asians work long hours for little pay, but are happy with their lot. They may live in more cramped conditions, but they earn more than they would working in the fields. Confucianism makes them more accepting, less confrontational than Westerners. Co-operative Asian-style management philosophy sorts out problems.

A fascinating, complex range of ordinary people's experiences meanwhile goes unreported. The great diversity of the region gets lost. The shift from rural to industrial work, getting and keeping a job and dealing with anti-social working conditions are all severe challenges. In Hong Kong and Korea, for instance, workers share similar problems with their equivalents in Western countries. Old, labour-intensive industries are closing. Older, unskilled workers are left out in the cold. To complete the circle, local multinational companies scour the region in search of the cheapest labour .

Yet growing worker militancy has become a trend uniting these diverse economies. Wherever you look certain demands are at the top of workers' agendas: reasonable pay and the time to enjoy it; safe, humane working conditions; and independent, effective workers' organizations.

Calls for more say in how work is organized, for a voice in how their miracle economies are run, resonate around the region. New forms of protest, of organizing and of building international solidarity are emerging.

So what would an 'alternative' TV current-affairs report from Asia reveal?

Based on real people, real interviews, real events of the last few years, it might look something like this. Sit back and tune in...

Good evening. In tonight's programme we go to Thailand, China and Hong Kong. But first, to Indonesia, where a wave of strikes has recently hit the town of Medan in Sumatra, 1,200 kilometres north-west of Jakarta.

'We get two weeks' pay on Saturdays, but it's gone by Monday,' says Sudin, a slight woman in her early twenties.

Like her 3,500 colleagues in a plywood factory, she's paid only $46 a month. For this she must work shifts, six days a week, often spending eight hours in the wood-drying section where, in her words, it gets 'very hot'. Any air conditioning? Of course not, replies Sudin.

Sudin and her colleagues, most of them women, joined local strikes last April, because they heard Indonesia's Minister of Manpower was visiting Medan. 'Workers from other factories were marching into town, so we decided to join them. We wanted to get better working conditions too,' Sudin says.

The demonstrations led to two days of riots apparently aimed at the ethnic Chinese business community, which left one business person dead. The riots may have been provoked by military *agents provocateurs*, it has subsequently emerged.

Sudin is with the other informal strike leaders, meeting in a local legal-aid centre. They seem edgy and excited – the experience of striking is completely new. Marsit, a man in his mid-twenties, insists the workers are neither militant nor violent. 'We are not demonstrating. That's too strong a word. Rather, we are just showing what we want.' That is a minimum wage of $1.40 a day, plus better allowances for food, transport and housing.

Pematang Siantar, a town near Medan, also saw spontaneous actions. 'The march looked like a sea of green, a thousand uniformed young women walking down the high street from their cigarette factory,' says Kathleen Kilkelly, a local church worker. 'The young men used megaphones, while the women sometimes stopped to sing and clap. Passers-by climbed on cars and market stalls to have a look – strikes are not so common here.'

'Before these demonstrations of 20-30,000 people, no-one here believed such things could happen,' adds Jafar Siddiq, a lawyer working in the legal-aid centre. The death in mysterious circumstances of a striking worker was the spark, but the root causes go deeper, Jafar says.

Poverty wages, non-enforcement of legal rights, appalling working conditions and intimidation of worker activists are all common. The strike wave that started in the early 1990s in Jakarta and other parts of Java, has now grown in magnitude and continues to cause headaches for Indonesia's military authorities, who are trying to package the country as Asia's new strife-free investment location.

In Medan grassroots worker-education courses often lie behind these otherwise spontaneous actions. Taslim, a stocky man in his twenties who works for a labour-education group, says:

'We have been organizing courses to teach workers their basic legal and political rights. In the year before these strikes we ran courses in 60 companies, often in secret in workers' hostels.'

This is important but dangerous work. The only legal trade union is controlled by the military. An independent union, the Indonesian Prosperous Labour Union (SBSI) is banned but struggling to survive; its leader Muchtar Pakpahan has been imprisoned for involvement in the Medan strikes.

Meanwhile, the plywood workers are confident of victory. Two days after our initial meeting Marsit says 'Six other companies have accepted the workers' demands, so we hope ours will too'.

Now to Thailand and China, where two groups of employees of the same multinational have been standing up for their rights, in contrasting ways. In Thailand they are remembering colleagues killed in Asia's worst factory fire, while in China campaigns for better working conditions are helping break the mould in this 'workers' paradise'.

Bart Simpson has a lot to answer for. Dolls in the image of this popular cartoon character are among the toys made by Kader Industrial, a Hong Kong-based TNC. Kader started operations in Hong Kong in the 1950s, later investing elsewhere in Asia, seeking out cheaper labour.

One destination was Thailand, where, for the last two years its name has meant just one thing: fire. On 10 May 1993 Kader's partly-owned Thai subsidiary, 20 kilometres from Bangkok, burnt down, killing 189 workers and injuring 500 others. Most victims were young women.

It is 8 May 1994 and Kader survivors, Thai trade unionists and their international supporters are marking the fire's anniversary with a traditional Buddhist ceremony. Offerings are made in a local temple and monks are invited to perform a ritual for the fire victims.

It is a solemn event, yet one that offers a time for reflection and for looking forward. Since the fire, campaigns for compensation have been intense. In addition to widespread protests in Thailand, survivors have received support from many Asian trade unions and citizens groups and have travelled to Hong Kong to confront Kader directly. It has denied responsibility, saying the Thai factory was managed separately.

Eventually compensation of around $8,000 is paid to each of the families of those killed, but Thai workers are not content. Their government has done little that it promised to tighten industrial safety; 'We want Thailand to learn from this tragic event', is the message at the end of the anniversary ceremony.

RICHARD SWIFT

Mean streets of Hong Kong. South Asian workers are a long way from home but Hong Kong dollars they earn doing the dirty work go a long way back in Karachi and Calcutta.

Yet there are more immediate concerns. Kader opened a new factory in March 1994 in Thailand's remote north-east province. Labour groups found that, as previously, Kader failed to meet safety and employment regulations. Will change have to await another tragedy? they ask.

In China, where Kader set up a toy factory in the mid-1980s, the news is more positive. The factory is in Shekou, Guangdong province, the heart of southern China's booming export economy, where double-digit growth rates continue to attract migrant workers from inland provinces.

They arrive to a harsh reality. When they can find jobs, working conditions are usually appalling. Kader used to be typical. An official survey in 1993 identified it as one of the province's harshest employers; daily wages were between 52 and 64 US cents, less than half the minimum wage.

In May 1993 Kader's Chinese workers said 'enough is enough'. At first they refused to work overtime, extending this to an all-out strike a couple of weeks later. The strike brought results. Wages now stand at between $1.70 and $2.30 a day and canteen and living quarters – another major area of complaint – have been improved.

The Kader workers' action is not an isolated case. Despite China's ban on free trade unions, labour exploitation and job insecurity have spawned an upsurge in such wild-cat strikes. The number of clandestine workers' groups is also increasing. In line with Communist ideology, workers are again at the forefront of change in China – yet in a manner the country's ageing leadership finds increasingly disturbing.

Finally, we go to Hong Kong, a territory in political and industrial transition. How does the head of one of East Asia's leading independent unions see his future role?

Lee Cheuk Yan, chief executive of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (CTU), is a busy man. We meet in his cramped backstreet office, tucked away among industrial workshops. A union training session is under way in the neighbouring room and phone calls and other interruptions are frequent.

'If we can't assert our union rights we can't expect to assert our political rights,' says Lee, a well-built man in his mid-thirties. Building a strong union base before Hong Kong returns to Chinese rule in 1997 is one of Lee's top priorities. 'We have to be able to stand up to China.'

Established only in 1990, the CTU already has 115,000 members. Its main rival, a much older union which supports China's communist regime, has around 200,000.

Lee and his union have been vocal supporters of campaigns for more democracy in both Hong Kong and China. The very public clashes between London and Beijing over Hong Kong's election system only scratch the political surface, Lee insists.

Grassroots union organizing, for instance, is crucial. Only one in five of Hong Kong's workers is in a union. Moreover, the territory has lost almost 50 per cent of its manufacturing jobs in the last 10 years – mostly to China – leaving many middle-aged, unskilled workers (especially women) with a bleak future. The service sector is booming but retraining schemes, which Lee supports, are limited and often do not lead to jobs.

'We make many proposals – on investment programmes, health and safety, working practices, many things – yet employers and the Government are very hostile to collectivism. But we will not, cannot give up our campaigns,' Lee adds as he is called away to another meeting.

In their struggles for better lives, better futures, are Lee Cheuk Yan in Hong Kong, Sudin and Marsit in Indonesia and the Kader workers in Thailand and China, trying to tell you something? Despite the familiar images, the miracle is boiling over and taking ordinary people with it. ■

Hugh Williamson, a journalist based in Germany, is author of *Coping with the Miracle: Japan's Unions Explore New International Relations* (Pluto Press, London, 1994).

CENTRAL AMERICA

EN HOMENAJ
PARA NO VOLVER AL
VERDAD Y JUSTIC
AHORA
FAES

SEAN SPRAGUE / PANOS PICTURES

Paint replaces blood on the walls of San Salvador: 'Truth and Justice now!' it reads.

Gamekeepers poach

Faltering start for 'civil' police in El Salvador

Lightning flashes over the San Salvador slum of San Ramon. The rains are dangerously late this year, as is justice. Pigs and children still forage for food in the local garbage dump. Life for the poor in El Salvador has not greatly improved with the end of the 12-year civil war.

But at least these days there are no tortured corpses among the rubbish. El Salvador has a new police force, the National Civil Police (PNC). And civil they appear to be. They have been trained by some 260 Spanish, Norwegian and Chilean police officers, working under the auspices of the United Nations Mission to El Salvador. Their cream-coloured shirts and tidy white Toyota trucks contrast with the country's remaining military police, who swagger through San Salvador's markets in black jump-suits or cruise the dirt lanes of San Ramon in fat Ford Pickups with M-16s at the ready.

According to the 1992 peace accords PNC officers should be 20 per cent former guerrillas, 20 per cent former military police and 60 per cent civilians. Each side has accused the other of smuggling in more officers than it is allowed.

Nonetheless, relations within the PNC are reported to be good. According to former rebel Macario Fuentes, who recently quit his job as a sergeant because he prefers repairing radios to intervening in domestic violence: 'Very few wartime resentments remain. People try to forget the past and not hold it against one another.'

'This is the first time we've had police who investigate crimes rather than commit them,' says one young man in San Ramon.

But a closer look reveals that all is not entirely well. The 'old security forces' are represented by the new Policia Nacional (PN). Without any retraining the 430-member Special Anti-Narcotics Unit and 140-member Special Investigations Unit have both been incorporated into the PN.

'These two units are a disaster,' laments Maria Julia Hernandez of the human-rights office of San Salvador's Archdiocese. 'Their track records are so bad the UN Truth Commission said they should be abolished and none of their members should ever be police again.'

Even so, many Salvadorans were beginning to believe that the PN could reform. Then a spectacular midmorning bank heist taught them differently. Nine gunmen, some of them in PN uniforms, raked the Banco Comercio with automatic fire. One of them sprayed the inside of the bank with an M-16, killing two. Four security guards were killed, at least one executed by a *coup-de-grace* shot as the raiders fled.

Quite by chance, however, a passing TV crew caught the whole robbery on video. The tape revealed that among the raiders was José Coreas Orellana, chief of criminal investigation for the PN. Orellana would have been the very officer in charge of investigating the robbery – and doubtless would have picked up some innocent 'culprit' from the streets. Even far-right President Caldoron Sol admitted that the PN had to go.

But what next? 'The real political test will come when the last of the PN are gone and the PNC has to deal with a new round of labour unrest,' says Macario Fuentes. 'That'll be a difficult day.' ■

Christian Parenti

Reprieve

Manuel Salazar, who was kidnapped by the US police and has spent 10 years on death row (see 'Updates' May 1994) has had his sentence revoked by the Illinois Supreme Court. His lawyer, Marlene Kamish, is sure that the international campaign launched in his defence had a decisive effect. A note of protest about the case was sent by the Mexican Government. Salazar may now be released, retried or returned to Mexico, where he was kidnapped. Meanwhile he remains incarcerated in Pontiac Correctional Center.

Source: Paul Donovan

JON SPAULL / PANOS PICTURES

Mandela petition

CORSO, the Aotearoa/NZ relief organization, has launched a petition protesting at the decision of South African President Nelson Mandela to allow the supply of South African arms to Indonesia. The petition says Indonesia has one of the worst human-rights records in the world. The Pacific Resource Concerns Centre, supporting the petition, pointed to Mr Mandela's refusal to take a stand on East Timor. He also refused to sign a petition against the imprisonment of East Timorese leader Xanana Gusmao, and descriped the Aboriginal issue in Australia as 'an internal matter'.

Source: Pacific News Bulletin, vol 9 no 10

DISASTER RELIEF

Much to be done

Lessons from the Maharashtra earthquake

NOVEMBER, midnight. I sat facing 700 eager faces awaiting the election of the 'Social Service Society'. Wanita, the village school mistress, addressed the crowd. 'It is up to us to direct our own development,' she said.

I arrived in Nandurga, Maharashtra, seven weeks after the earthquake struck on 30 September 1993. Sixty-five villages lay destroyed. The official death toll stood at 12,682. An equal number probably lay unaccounted for beneath the rubble. In the shortcomings of the relief effort I discovered a new disaster.

Relief supplies had flooded the local market. Farmers waited for emergency rations rather than work for a crop they couldn't sell. Land prices had rocketed, stimulated by building contractors and aid agencies. The Government wanted to relocate the villagers 14 kilometres away from their fields. Nobody wanted to live in the temporary shelters. Cramped living conditions led to widespread illness. People with 'body-ache' – a clear symptom of post-traumatic stress – were pumped full of painkillers which gave them gastroenteritis. The Government still hadn't built a single house.

JANE AUBREY

The real reconstruction effort begins as women in Nandurga get to work.

So the 'Social Service Society' made proposals to buy seeds, fertilizer, a community-owned tractor; to set up women's groups, youth groups. Street players and puppet shows on health and alcoholism now provide village entertainment. Nursery schools have been formed. Savings schemes have been set up for income-generating activity centres – tailoring, handicrafts, welding, masonry, carpentry – freeing the villagers to build their own homes in their own way.

Only when the official relief programme came to an end could the real reconstruction effort begin. ■

Jane Aubrey

Bad for business

T CHARLIER / CAMERA PRESS

Mobutu escapes again

Recent democratic experiments in French-speaking Africa – in Congo, Gabon and Niger – have apparently made some Frenchmen conclude that democracy does not suit French business and strategic interests. This view has gained ground since conservatives won a majority in the French parliament last year. Evidence of the shift came when France invited Mobutu Sese Seco, the dictator of Zaire, to a Franco-African summit in Paris in November 1994, enhancing his chances of survival. They had been strengthened in any case when Mr Kengo became prime minister of Zaire last June: half-Polish, half-Rwandan, Mr Kengo is not eligible to run for the presidency and challenge Mobutu himself.

The Economist, vo 333 no 7885

No labels

In response to increasing concern in the biotechnology industry that consumers will not buy genetically-engineered foods if they are labelled as such, the US delegation to a recent meeting in Ottawa of the regulatory body Codex Alimentarius proposed that they should not be. The move was opposed by some sections of the food industry itself which have no vested interest in selling genetically-engineered foods and claimed they were being asked to deceive their customers.

Source: The Splice of Life vol 1 no 5

IRAQ

Starving arc

Zoo animals' distress in Baghdad

THE director of Baghdad's famous zoo, Dr Ardil Salman Musa, is a man with a slowly breaking heart.

'Before the UN blockade we imported specialist food from the UK, the US and Russia and we had expert advice from London Zoo,' he tells me. 'Now we have very little food and medical problems too are insurmountable, with no veterinary medicines, vaccinations, antibiotics, stun-guns or tranquilizers.'

The lioness has died from a viral infection. Her mate pines in his spacious den amid the palm groves. He emits echoing roars of distress from the fever and pneumonia he has suffered for the last six months – and, says Dr Musa, from his grief. The tormented, grieving lion seems doomed.

In July the Bengal tiger had three cubs. Two survive, hanging on despite malnourishment. Another female died. 'When we treated her,' says Dr Musa with weary understatement, 'I had to hang on to her tail, whilst my colleague quickly injected her – this is a very dangerous practice.'

An engaging honey-coloured bear lies in a foetal position, paws cupping soulful eyes. It has been lying thus for two years, says Dr Musa, refusing to venture into the sun. It is, he feels, acutely depressed.

Ancient donkeys wander through the palms, bougainvillea and hibiscus, unaware of their fate – as meat for the animals. Most of the joyful, chattering, recklessly acrobatic monkeys have died. One tame and gentle favourite with the children severed a child's hand, probably driven by hunger.

Pet dogs look pitifully through the bars of cages that once housed endangered species – their owners have brought them to the zoo in desperation, unable to feed their families, let alone their pets. They vow to collect them when the blockade ends – but no-one in Iraq believes it ever will. The people, like the animals, are helpless, the victims of events over which they have no control.

As we leave the zoo the gatekeeper hands out tickets blindly. He is a diabetic. With insulin virtually unobtainable and no corrective diet he has lost his sight.

'We are so tired,' says Dr Musa, 'but what can we do? We are in the hands of God...' It is a refrain one hears reiterated wherever one goes in Iraq. ■

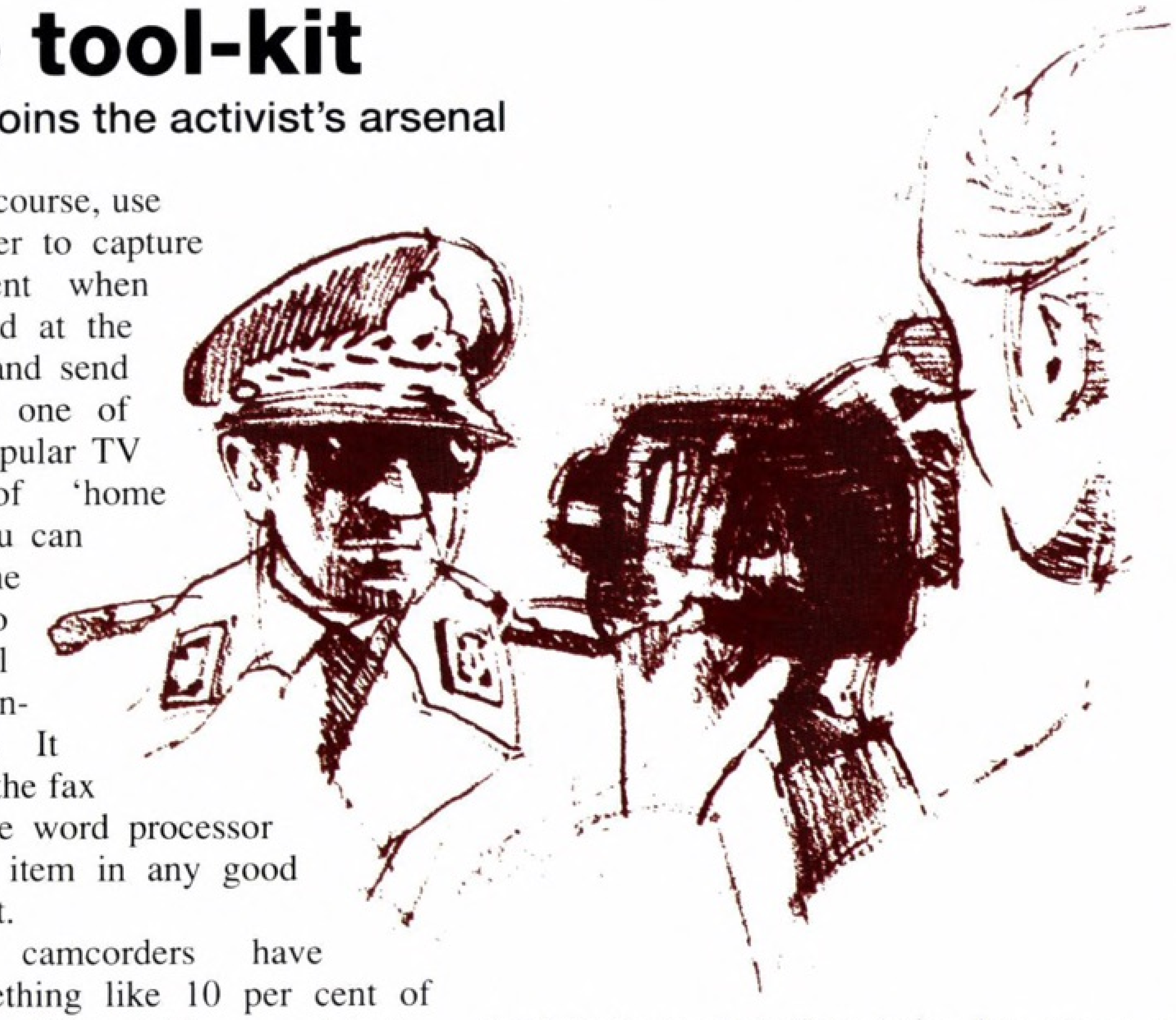
Felicity Arbuthnot

FELICITY ARBUTHNOT

MEDIA

Video tool-kit

Camcorder joins the activist's arsenal



ALAN HIGHES

YOU can, of course, use a camcorder to capture the moment when dad breaks wind at the dinner table – and send in the tape to one of those hugely popular TV compilations of 'home videos'. But you can also use the camcorder to fight for social and environmental justice. It has now joined the fax machine and the word processor as an essential item in any good activist's tool-kit.

Sales of camcorders have exploded. Something like 10 per cent of households in the UK and 20 per cent in the US own one. Almost anyone can film a polluting sewer or anti-fascist rally, then play it back to friends, journalists or politicians.

The most sensational example so far has been the beating of Rodney King by police in Los Angeles, captured on video by a stranger in a nearby apartment block and then broadcast around the world.

But there are plenty of others. The Ogoni in Nigeria filmed massacres of their people. Thai students filmed a military crackdown. Film shot last September showed a campaigner dangling from a crane in downtown Sydney to denounce the fiftieth anniversary of the World Bank. Activists blocking operations in Clayoquot Sound, Canada, use camcorders to ensure arrests are 'friendly' and avoid false charges. In the UK anti-road protesters say that when a camcorder is present security guards are noticeably less violent.

Even established groups regularly provide footage for news organizations. In the US the Reebok Foundation has set up a 'Witness' programme to supply human-rights groups around the world with camcorders to chronicle injustices.

But TV stations regularly reject footage shot by activists. And there is now a glut of campaigners' material. Effective editing and distribution networks are needed. Camnet in Los Angeles allows footage to be swapped, while Deep Dish rents cheap air time on local cable TV around the US. Exploding Cinema in the UK has projected films onto the walls of abandoned swimming pools. Small World's 'Undercurrents' distributes edited footage quarterly through mail-order and book shops.

As the media are controlled by a smaller and smaller number of people, the camcorder is blowing a slightly blurry but passionate and democratic wind across the world. *Viva las Camcordistas!* ■

Thomas Harding

For more information contact Small World Media, 1a Waterlow Road, London N19 5NJ

Back to work

The US once led the world in cutting the average working week – from 70 hours in 1850 to less than 40 hours by the 1950s. Since the 1970s, however, the hours clocked up by US workers have risen, to an average in the manufacturing sector of 42 hours in 1994. The length of the average working week continues to fall in Europe and Japan. But surveys suggest that, given a choice, Americans actually prefer to work more not fewer hours. Explanations vary – from the appeal of shopping (which costs a lot of money) as a pastime, to boring TV and even, according to recent surveys, the small amount of time taken up by sex.

Source: The Economist volume 333 no 7886

Quota plans

A scheme to increase affirmative action to overcome the rigid social hierarchy of India's ancient caste system has sparked violence in a number of states. In a bid to win votes in recent elections the governments in states like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu unveiled policies aimed at reserving up to 70 per cent of public-sector jobs for lower castes. At least 20 people were killed in Uttar Pradesh when police opened fire on agitators protesting against 'bias' towards groups known as 'Other Backward Communities'. Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao still plans to make 27 per cent of public-sector jobs available for Indians belonging to around 1,200 different groups.

Source: Rahul Bedi/Gemini

Burma pipeline

PETER GRANT / CAMERA PRESS

A foreign-funded natural-gas pipeline from the Andaman Sea across Burma to Thailand involves forest destruction and forced labour. A consortium composed of Premier, Nippon Oil and Texaco is developing the Yetagun gas concession, and in the Yadana field the French company Total has been joined by Unocal from the US. Environmental and human-rights groups are calling upon the oil companies to abandon the scheme and are demanding an international boycott of Burma's military regime.

Source: Pamela Wellner/The Ecologist vol 24 no 5

END

END Quote

'Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies a final sense of theft from those who hunger and are not fed, from those who are cold and are not clothed.'

General Dwight D Eisenhower,
former President of the United States

WORLD MUSIC NETWORK
CATALOGUE 1
World Music
THE ROUGH GUIDE

music

The Rough Guide to World Music

THE BOOK:

edited by **Simon Broughton, Mark Ellingham, David Muddyman and Richard Trillo** *(Rough Guides/ Penguin Books ISBN 1-85828-017-6)*

THE MUSIC:

by **Various** *(World Music Network RGNET 1001 CD/10001C MC)*

It's great that folk musics from around the world really have in the past 10 years attained the global audiences they deserve. But who knows anything much about, say, Tuvan throat singers, Jewish *klezmer* musicians or the *bordello* origins of the Argentine tango? Listeners and critics alike can often be overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of releases now available – and the corresponding lack of information.

Sigh no more, for with the publication of the **Rough Guide to World Music** this looks set to change. The authoritative 700-page book is accompanied by a 15-track CD/casette – and the two are indispensable to anyone with an interest in this area.

The book is extremely user-friendly. The editors have divided the world into 13-block segments, each of which is subdivided into further blocks. The North American entry alone includes Native American music, Appalachian, Tex-Mex, gospel, folk. The myriad varieties of African and Latin music are well represented, but so too are the lesser known sounds from the Balkans, Maghreb or East Asia. There are discoveries, small interviews, guides to performers, instruments and the individual musical cultures and festivals. The book's sections are written by a team of 80 experts and are suitable for in-depth study as well as browsing. But for real atmosphere, it's hard to beat one of the eyewitness accounts of a festival on the Asian steppes held in the light of a full moon.

To its credit, the **Guide** avoids the usual problems of definition that dog compilers of world music. It takes a relatively simple tack that all manifestations of music, be they ancient or modern, are valid. Thus a section on Indian *filmi* (soundtrack music) sits between accounts of Indian classical and the devotional *qawwali* music of Pakistan.

As a carefully compiled taster, whose listening can be enriched by its referencing to the book, the **Rough Guide** disc is also well-recommended. Including artists such as Joe Arroyo (Colombia), Africando (Senegal), Ali Hassan Kuban (Egypt), Sainko Namchylak (Siberia) and Scotland's Talitha MacKenzie – the moods are, unsurprisingly, mixed. Some tracks, like Muzsikas' Hungarian Jewish dances, the Oyster Band's Irish offering and Buckwheat's *Zydeco Party* – are purely rumbustious affairs. Other tracks – like Guo Yue and Joji Hirota's *Goodbye Again* – are poignant and odd. Namchylak, a woman Tuvan singer who trained in Shamanistic music, contributes perhaps the most extraordinary track. Called *Tanola Nomads*, its crashing gongs and Westernized ambient setting combine with her haunting voice to produce a very special sound.

Links can be made between the tracks. There are two very different kinds of salsa from Colombia and Senegal, for example – and the rhythmical undertow of the latter has echoes in the track from Mali. The album is arranged to illuminate such similarities and differences. Between the **Rough Guide** book and the album there is, quite literally, a whole world to be explored. Enjoy!

Book
Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆☆
CD/MC
Politics ☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆

film

The Bandit Queen

directed by **Shekhar Kapur**

Already a director of established repute in India, Shekhar Kapur has found international fame with his latest film **The Bandit Queen**. It is a remarkable piece of work, not least because of the controversy it has engendered, leading it to be banned in India for the present. The story is based on the real-life events surrounding Phoolan Devi as she grew up in the 1970s. Destitute and from a lower caste, she was subjected to the most humiliating physical and mental abuse from a group of high-caste men in her village. Unable to take it any more, she got her revenge when she transgressed all convention and joined a group of bandits, eventually becoming the leader of her own gang until her arrest in 1983. By then she had become a folk heroine and revolutionary symbol with her devotees creating their own images of her.

In an attempt to understand how a myth is made, Kapur and the screenwriter Mala Sen – who wrote a book about Devi based on the diaries she kept while in prison – create a mythology of their own. The extraordinary story deals with issues of sexuality and class – which make it so contentious in India – and is filmed in epic style with much made of the cracked and hard Chambal valley landscape in which the action is set. The haunting soundtrack by the Qawwali singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan compounds the mood. But central to the film is the brilliant performance from Seema Biswas who plays Devi with a suitably fierce intensity. Certainly the role is not an easy one. The scenes in which Devi is raped and tortured are extremely disturbing, though sensitively constructed to avoid exploitation. 'Was I born of an act of love or violence?' Devi cries at one point, feeling no more than a piece of dispensable trash. Biswas persuades us of Devi's transformation as, rather than remain a victim, she is fuelled by a visceral anger and ends up perpetrating bloody deeds of her own.

If this is not dramatic material enough, the film already has its own bizarre coda. While the film champions Devi, she herself has chosen to distance herself from it – though she has yet to see it. What's more she has threatened to set herself on fire if **The Bandit Queen** is ever released in India; hence the present ban. Kapur is attempting to contest the decision and one suspects there is a further saga to come.

Politics ☆☆☆☆
Entertainment ☆☆☆☆☆

film OF THE YEAR

French-Vietnamese director Tran Anh Hung's striking debut with **The Scent of Green Papaya** marks the arrival of a great talent in world cinema. The film, set in Saigon in the 1950s and told from the point of view of a young servant girl working for a middle-class family, unravels an intricate part of the social fabric of traditional Vietnamese society. It is a subtle, beautifully observed examination of class and the position of women that also obliquely anticipates the political upheavals to come. *(reviewed in **NI 255**)*

music OF THE YEAR

The FBI are not exactly noted for their musical acumen but they got it right with native American singer-songwriter John Trudell. Described in a 17,000-page dossier as 'extremely eloquent', Trudell marries rocky blues with a talent for poetry. In **Johnny Damas and Me** *(Rykodisc RCD/RAC 10286)*, he never tells us who Damas is – Damas remains as ghostly as Trudell's Santee Sioux ancestors, living beneath the 'coyote moon' of 'Nazi Babylon'. Trudell, like the best folk songwriters, notices people – the poor, the dispossessed. *(Reviewed in **NI 255**)*

books OF THE YEAR

Susan Griffin's long-awaited **A Chorus of Stones** *(The Women's Press ISBN 0-7043-4387-8, UK, and Allen and Unwin, Australia)* was published in the UK and Australia in 1994 – though it has been out in North America for a couple of years. This poetic, thought-provoking exploration into the 'private world of war' combines incisiveness with passion and compassion. A book that scores highest on originality and authenticity is **Aman, the Story of a Somali Girl** *(Bloomsbury ISBN 0 7475 17614, UK)*. It's the racy, colourful, first-person narrative of an illiterate Somali woman as told to anthropologists Virginia Lee Barnes and Janice Boddy. Aman's picaresque life-story is also that of her troubled country. It's a riveting read and Aman is an engaging and spirited story-teller. *(Reviewed in **NI 262** and **261**)*

STAR RATING

Excellent	☆☆☆☆☆
Very good	☆☆☆☆
Good	☆☆☆
Fair	☆☆
Poor	☆

Reviews editor: **Vanessa Baird**

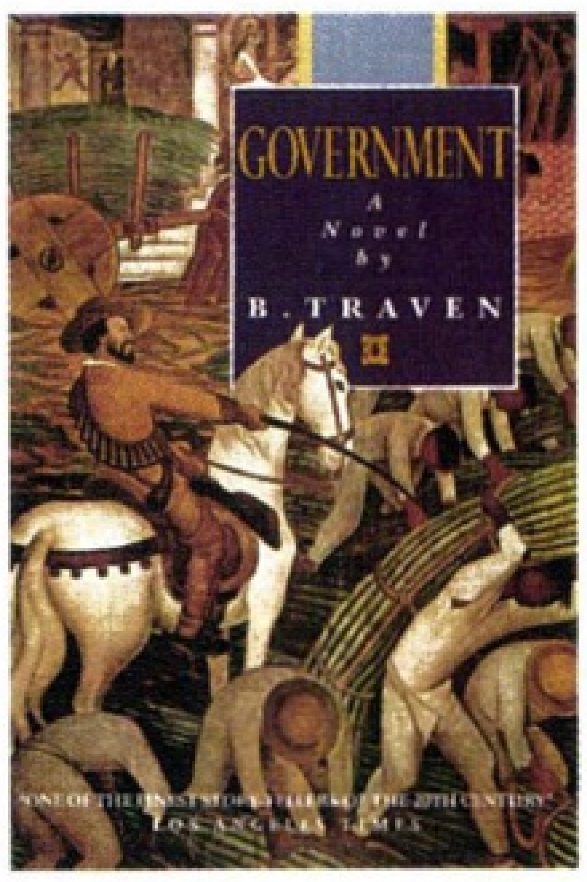
THE *classic*

The Jungle Novels of B Traven

...being the socially impassioned series written by a most mysterious author.

Do authors matter? Does what we know of the personality and life history of the writer colour our reaction to the written word? B Traven, author of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, certainly thought so and throughout his life kept his identity and his past closely guarded secrets. Few writers have courted obscurity so obsessively as this strange, difficult man, who believed 'the creative person should have no other biography than his [sic] works'.

Yet Traven did assiduously cultivate the myths surrounding his identity, and the fictions he lived contributed as much to his enduring fame as the fictions he wrote. After briefly sketching his bafflingly complex life we will do as he advises and concentrate on the work – in particular his sweeping panorama of Mexico, the six 'Jungle Novels'.


GOVERNMENT
A Novel by
B. TRAVEN
'ONE OF THE FINEST STORY-TELLERS OF THE 20TH CENTURY' LOS ANGELES TIMES

The writer's childhood and early life continue to resist the best efforts of Traven-hunters and, although there are many theories, hard fact is absent. The author we know as B Traven emerged in Germany – in the first of his many aliases – as Ret Marut, an actor and radical pamphleteer who published the anarchist paper *Der Ziegelbrenner* ('The Brickburner'). Active in the short-lived Bavarian Socialist Republic of 1918-1919, he narrowly escaped execution in the backlash that followed its collapse. He fled by a convoluted route to Mexico, where he lived for the rest of his life and where the bulk of his fiction is set.

Since then Traven's work has been translated into more than a dozen languages and his novels have sold over 30 million copies. Early books, such as *The Death Ship, The Cottonpickers* and *The White Rose* combine strong plots and action with didactic socialist messages and a wry sense of humour. Traven continued his shadow games to the end of his life, adopting various further aliases and even – during the filming of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* – having himself taken onto the payroll in the guise of his own agent, Hal Groves.

Good as they were, the earlier novels were primarily adventure yarns, with added social realism. Traven's true masterpiece – the 'Jungle Novels' series – was published between 1931 and 1940 and stands as one of literature's most sustained and impassioned pleas for justice. The books cover the first decade of the twentieth century – the closing years of the rule of Mexican dictator Porfirio Diaz and a time of rampant corruption, exploitation and cruel repression. In simple, no-nonsense prose they set out to explore how the lives of ordinary people were changed by the momentous events of the Mexican Revolution. In the first book, **Government**, the problems are defined as we meet the local landlord who enriches himself by exploiting and extorting the *peons* in his fiefdom, sending them to the killing conditions of the mahogany-logging camps in the province of Chiapas. In **The Carreta** Andres Ugalde – theoretically free but in virtual serfdom – is lost by his 'master' in a game of cards. He learns to drive an ox-cart – a *carreta* – and gains a broadening of his blinkered view of the world, incidentally providing the reader with a pocket history of the country.

Traven returns to the mahogany camps with **March to the Monteria** and charts the smouldering rebellion of the indentured labourers. **Trozas** and **Rebellion of the Hanged** add new faces to the cast of characters as the angry workers find leaders, organize themselves and formulate demands. In **The General from the Jungle** the revolt catches fire, with the emergence of a Zapata-like figure to spearhead the struggle of the peons.

The 'Jungle Novels' are ideologically shrill, simplifying the complexities of the Mexican revolution into a '*peons* good/landlords bad' dichotomy. But these criticisms are dwarfed by the positive energies of the books, by Traven's deep insight into the individual characters and his understanding that insurrection is nothing if it does not benefit the poorest. In **Rebellion of the Hanged** he remarks that, 'revolutions are made not only to change systems but also the mean souls of men'.

The books contain a wealth of accurate and well-researched detail concerning the folklore and wisdom of the Indian rural poor, but they transcend these specifics. Written during the rise of the Nazis and the Second World War they encapsulate Traven's anti-fascist credo. And we need look no further than the setting for the 'Jungle Novels' - Chiapas province - to see the continuing urgent relevance of Traven's writing. The uprising which began in Chiapas on 1 January 1994 has demanded the same rights and freedoms; the communiqués of the present-day Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) rebels explicitly link their struggle to that of their Zapatista forebears. Traven, who died in 1967, would have recognized and saluted this continuity of resistance and seen it as a mark of the resilience and spirit of the poorest of the poor. In the deregulated free-trade New World Order *Tierra y Libertad!* remains the battlecry of the dispossessed.

Peter Whittaker

*Allison and Busby are republishing all **B Traven's** 'Jungle Novels': **Government** and **Trozas** were published in March 1994; **The Carreta** is available from January 1995; **March to Monteria** later in the year and **Rebellion of the Hanged** and **The General from the Jungle** in 1996. They also hope to publish a British edition of a biography, **B Traven, the Life Behind the Legends** by Karl S Guthke (Lawrence Hill, US, 1991)*

Q? UESTIONS

...that have always intrigued you about the world will appear in this, your section, and be answered by other readers. Please address your answers and questions to 'Curiosities'.

Where and when did the tradition of female circumcision (or genital mutilation) originate?

● 'Genital mutilation' is the more correct term, as an unnecessary operation which confers no benefits on the victim is classified a mutilation.

The origins are impossible to trace but the practice is certainly pre-Islamic and seems to have been centred on the Horn of Africa and the Nile Valley. Islam has been blamed for its spread and it is indeed most common in states that are both African and Muslim, but it is not found in the seat of Islam, Saudi Arabia, or in many other Muslim countries. Nor, most importantly, is it a requirement laid down in the Qu'ran and some Imams are the most vociferous in condemning the practice.

Apart from false claims to being an Islamic requirement, Female Genital Mutilation is also claimed to produce chastity and promote fertility and better hygiene – all patently invalid and irrational claims. Indeed, it is the cause of child deaths, of chronic health problems and of obstetric difficulties – a curiously perverse outcome in societies which value women for their fertility.

Although an ancient tradition it has spread in this century – for instance, in the enquirer's own country, Sudan. It spread to parts of western Sudan as recently as 1918 when a nomadic tribe moved in bringing the practice with them. The original inhabitants were persuaded to adopt the practice because the men were told it would enhance their sexual satisfaction. There are now rumours that the practice is appearing in Pakistan too, a source of great concern to those of us who have been working for its eradication in Africa, where the 10-year-old Inter-African Committee against Harmful Traditional Practices is making slow but definite progress in its educational and lobbying campaign work.

ABBAS / MAGNUM

There's nothing in the Qu'ran – or in Islam – to support female genital mutilation.

Joan Higman Davies
British Support Group for Inter-African Committee against Harmful Traditional Practices
Upton upon Severn, UK

How could the International Monetary Fund force a country – like Canada – to pay its debt if that country's Government told it to go to hell? Whose army would the IMF use?

● From time to time the IMF allows its member states to draw foreign currency beyond their entitled limit of 200 per cent of that state's contribution to the Fund. If a country fails to perform its duties - including repayment of overdrawn money - the IMF may declare that it can no longer access the Fund money. The Fund does not actually 'force' repayment, but such a declaration makes it very difficult for the country to borrow from other – usually commercial – sources. Most countries need commercial loans and cannot afford loss of credibility by the IMF's rejection. This is why they are compelled not only to make repayments but to meet the IMF conditions, such as 'structural adjustment'.

Yutaka Kawasaki
Perth, Australia

AWAITING YOUR ANSWERS

Where does the Eastern Hemisphere end and the Western begin? Where is the vertical Equator? Is this just another variation on the First-Third world, North-South division? If so where do Turkey and Mexico fall?

Claire Thomas
Ankara, Turkey

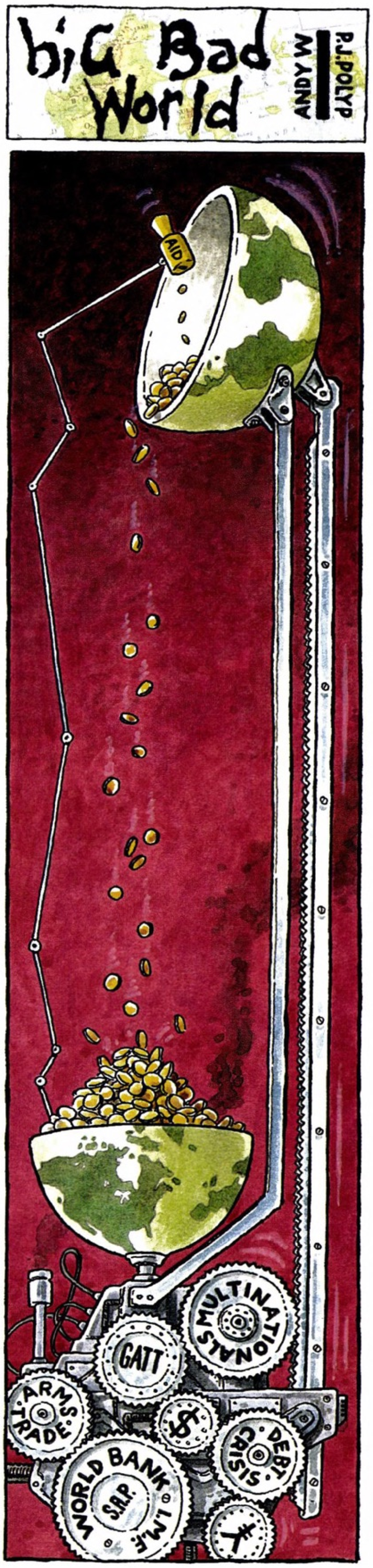
What is the origin of the expression 'a different kettle of fish'. Does it – as it would appear – have psychedelic origins?

Hugh Jamieson
Port Glasgow, UK

How come gases which are normally considered heavier than air - such as chlorine, carbon monoxide and dioxide - are reaching the upper layers of our atmosphere? I understand that if they are heated before emission they may rise until the temperature is equalized. But surely then they would fall back down again?

PJ Crawley
Basingstoke, UK

If you have any questions or answers please send them to Curiosities, **New Internationalist, 55 Rectory Road, Oxford OX4 1BW, UK,** or to your local **NI** office (see inside front cover for addresses).



Cool news

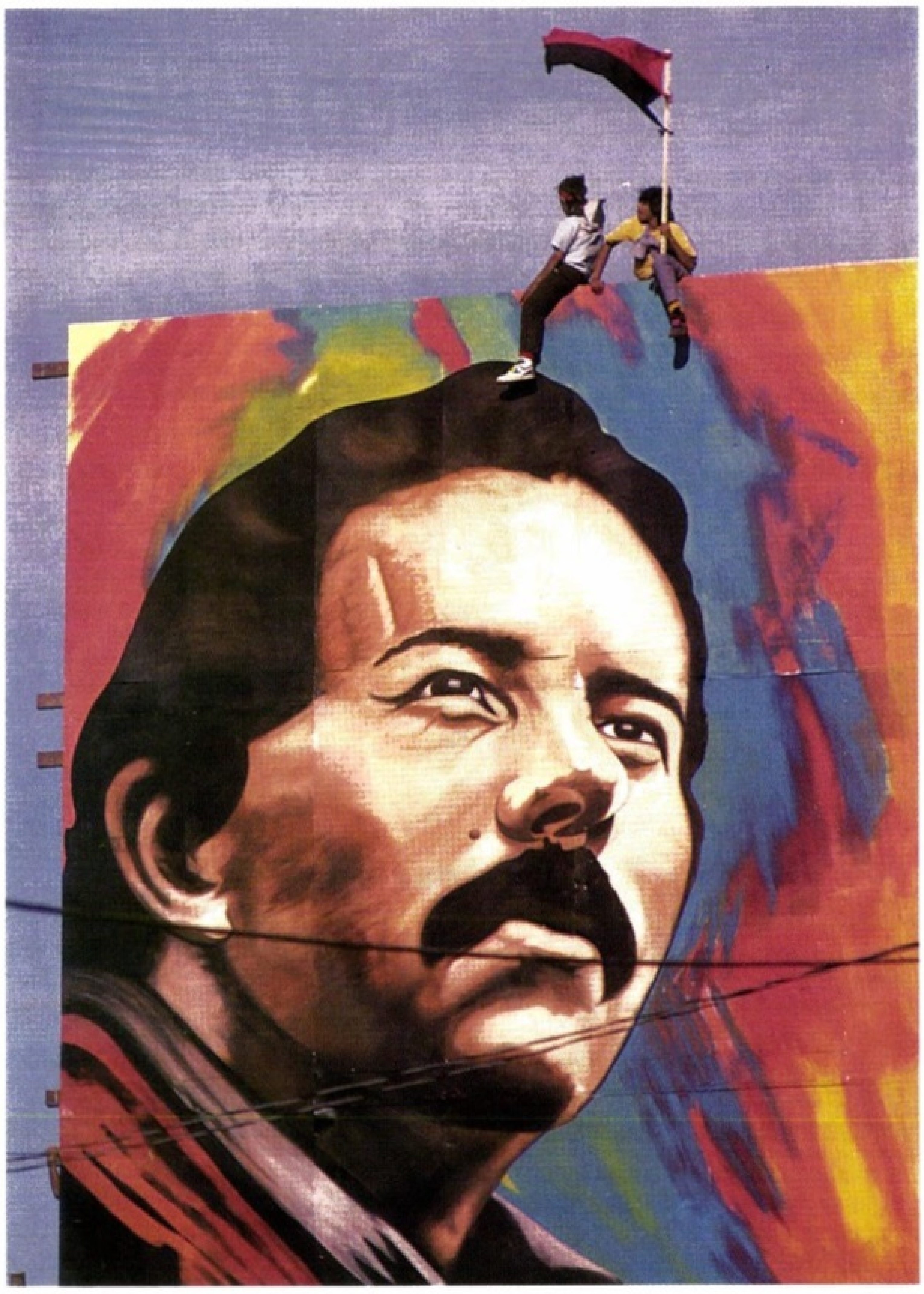
The absence of turmoil does not mean that Central America has settled for conservatism, argues ***James Dunkerley****.*

CENTRAL America went out of the news some time ago. 'Anglo-Saxons expect Latin politics to be hot,' says one leading Central American politician of the centre-left, 'to be vividly expressive of either high expectations – as in the Cuban and Nicaraguan Revolutions – or of heroic defeat, as in the Chilean tragedy. Now the fighting is over we have lost the interest and the audience.'

Nobody living between the jungles of the Petén in northern Guatemala and the Darien Gap in Panama could possibly regret the passing of the massacres that afflicted the region in the 1980s. But in the process Central America appears once again to have become an impoverished backwater under the uncontested dominion of powerful landlords and transnationals.

The Sandinistas in Nicaragua and the former guerrillas of the FMLN in El Salvador lost elections, while the rebels in Guatemala have been strategically defeated. The 1989 US invasion of Panama proved uncontroversial at home, relatively easy to stage and provoked minimal diplomatic embarrassment for Washington. In Honduras and Costa Rica - where there was no military conflict in the 1980s – conservative forces have held their own without great difficulty despite introducing fierce neo-liberal policies.

Now all eyes are on Cuba, long depicted as the most dangerous sponsor of local insurgencies and now so wracked by economic failure that charges for basic medicines have been introduced for the first time since 1959 – a move seen by some as signalling the end of the Revolution.



Sandinistas celebrate election defeat in Managua.

PAUL SMITH / PANOS

North American commentators and officials have lost their nervousness of a few years back. Their style is now casually bullish. Few of their blandishments are neutralized by the solidarity movements in the US or Europe, which have lost popular support – although non-partisan campaigns over human rights have maintained their influence.

All this suggests that politics in Central America reflect the end of the Cold War and the general decline of the Left. Nonetheless, the retreat from armed conflict has proved rather more difficult to conduct than weary cold warriors anticipated. Progressive forces have proved more tenacious and influential in the post-war period than Washington and regional right-wingers would like to admit.

In Nicaragua the Sandinistas remain by far the largest and strongest single political party. The right-wing slate that won the 1990 poll has split, and the Chamorro Government, beset by strikes against its neo-liberal policies as well as conservative sectarianism, has become heavily reliant upon Sandinista co-operation. This presents the Sandinistas with unfamiliar challenges, but it also makes the launching of a full 'counter-revolution' reversing the changes introduced since 1979 much more unlikely.

In El Salvador the Left won more democratic concessions through the Chapultepec Accords of January 1992 than have ever prevailed in that country since independence in the early nineteenth century. The former guerrillas in the FMLN are starting to change political culture in a highly ideologized society. In Guatemala there is a popular movement that is cautious but also a threat to the oligarchy, which had to step back from supporting the ultra-right coup attempt of May 1993 when the popular movement came onto the streets. Washington also sided with the democratic camp for the first time in decades.

The Panamanian elections of May 1994 were won convincingly by the party – the PRD – most opposed to the 1989 invasion and most critical of Washington. The 'new beginning' promised after the removal of disgraced president Noriega has fallen far short of the easy claims made at the time.

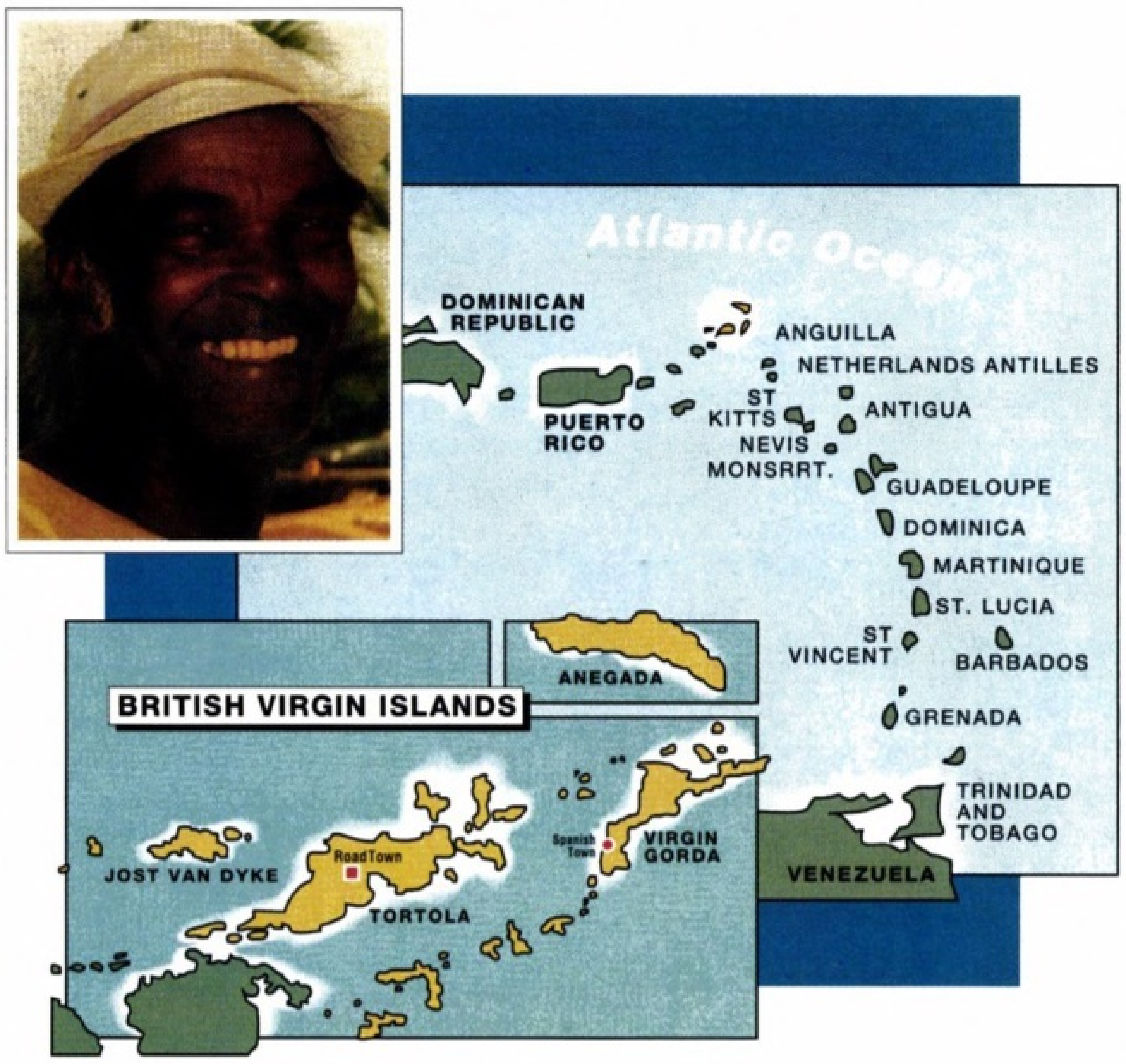
Washington certainly stopped a regional revolution founded on the 1979 victory in Nicaragua, but the Left also disturbed generations of autocratic domination. This is evident too in Mexico with the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas on the border with Guatemala; in Haiti, where the Clinton administration has opted for direct intervention against a gang of thugs; and in Colombia, where the issues of drug controls and national sovereignty are once again escalating into a serious diplomatic rift with Washington.

Meanwhile, Central Americans have emerged from the civil wars poorer than they were at the onset of conflict at the end of the 1970s. The evidence suggests that not enough of them have been terrorized, demoralized or convinced by free-market mantras to guarantee a prolonged era of conservatism. The politics are only occasionally hot but they are getting very interesting. ■

James Dunkerley's latest book, *The Pacification of Central America – Political Change in the Isthmus 1987-93*, is published by Verso.

British Virgin Islands

THE new prison being built in the British Virgin Islands (BVI) looks out onto glistening blue tropical waters, white beaches and a string of small green islands. Unlike the new $20 million government building in the capital, or the giant new cruise-ship dock, this building does not reflect the noble path of 'progress' which the people of these tiny islands are supposed to be experiencing. It represents the shameful baggage which comes with it. Sadly there is a pressing need for a prison. American-style gun-crime has seeped into the country with devastating consequences for a community that 10 years ago scarcely knew such evils.



The BVI's population is distributed between four islands (there are 36 in all) though most people live on the largest, Tortola. The islands are self-governing though not independent from Britain, whose resident Governor acts as representative of the Crown.

Most people enjoy a quality of life uncommon in the Caribbean. The use of the US currency and the steady growth in the yachting industry and up-market hotels have combined to create a tourism economy envied by others in the region. As the major source of employment, tourism has attracted an increasing number of immigrants seeking work.

Political power lies with a small group of individuals some of whom have been in and out of power for many years. The Chief Minister Lavitty Stoutt of the Virgin Islands Party has this time held office since 1987 when his predecessor, Cyrill Romney, resigned in the islands' biggest known political scandal. Romney had been closely linked to a local trust company alleged to have been laundering large amounts of 'dirty' money. His name was subsequently cleared and he is now Leader of the Opposition in the single-chamber Legislative Council.

Trust companies and off-shore banking earned the Government $19 million in 1993. The no-tax and no-questions-asked attitude makes BVI attractive to depositers wanting to tuck funds away anonymously. Government fees taken from this electronic banking industry (no cash comes onto the island) have helped to solve the economic problem of over-reliance on tourism, but at present there is only cursory attention paid to the origins of the money.

More visible than the drug profits hiding on computers are the increasing number of drug *users*. The 1980s brought a glut of cocaine which was easy to come by with so much being smuggled through the islands. Now there is crack, stealing young minds and turning human resources into desperate liabilities. Muggings, drive-by and even execution-style killings have shaken this once parochial world into a reality it never imagined.

The lure of this paradise now sits uneasily with the changed world of the BVI's people. Once sleepy islands where the few people who lived there knew every face are now beginning to resemble a cross between Disneyland and a violent ghetto. Soon the people will have to stop being dazzled by the US and see what can be done about the real problems they now face.

Steven Farami

AT A glance

Excellent	★★★★★
Good	★★★★
Fair	★★★
Poor	★★
Appalling	★

POLITICS

UK Dependent Territory; locally elected Chief Minister and Legislative Council control most of territory's affairs.

INCOME DISTRIBUTION ★★★★

Wealthy nation, minimal levels of absolute poverty.

LITERACY ★★★★★

98 % for women and men.

SELF-RELIANCE ★

Everything imported, European and UK aid. Minimal farming.

FREEDOM ★★★★★

Freedom of press and expression.

POSITION OF WOMEN ★★★

Increasing numbers in work, including some top jobs – though generally (male) chauvinist society.

LIFE EXPECTANCY ★★★★★

72 years male, 77 years female (US 76 years).

Leader Head of State Queen Elizabeth II, Chief Minister H Lavity Stoutt.
Economy GNP per capita US$8,500 *(US$22,240).*
Monetary unit: US Dollar.
Tourism and international banking are the main planks of the economy. Small agricultural sector in livestock, fruit and vegatables, sugar cane (mainly used for rum production) and fishing.
Main exports: Rum, fish, handicrafts, fruit, vegetables and gravel.
Main imports: Foodstuffs, building materials, cars, machinery and fuel.
People 17,000.
Health Infant mortality 27 per 1,000 live births *(US 9 per 1,000).*
Culture 90 per cent of BV Islanders are of Afro-Caribbean descent, 10 per cent are European, American, Indian or Middle Eastern. 40 per cent of population is from other Caribbean islands, 10 per cent from US or Europe. Large BVI populations in Florida, Washington and Toronto. West Indian culture mixed with US (all TV is from the USA).
Religion: Various forms of Christianity; largely Protestant.
Language: English.

***Sources:** The State of the World's Children 1994, UNICEF; The Americas Review 1993/94; and information supplied by the author.*

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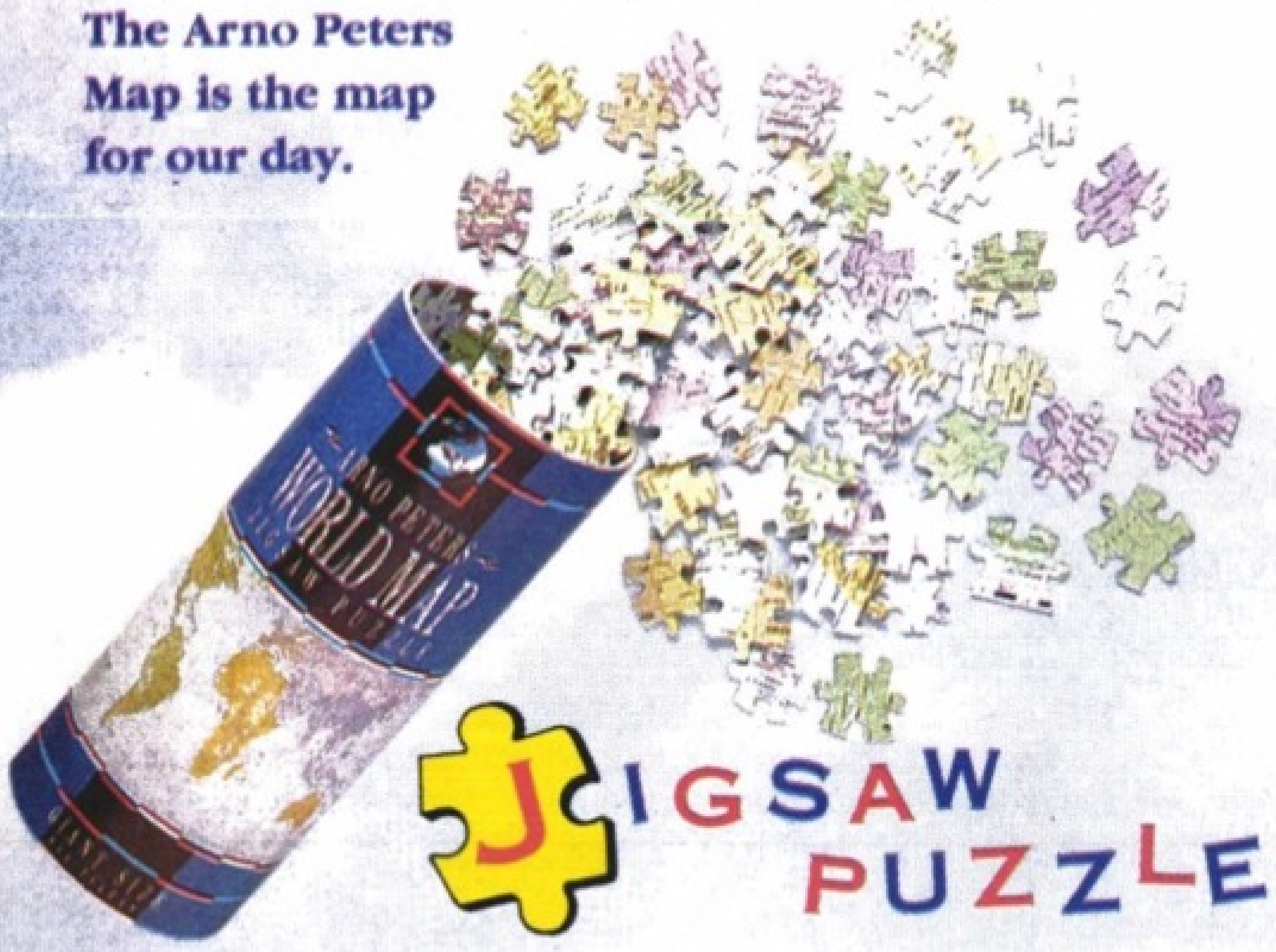

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